Pass the potatoes and the policies

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force bites off an ambitious public policy agenda to reduce hunger in Oregon

The Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force has taken a long-term approach to ending hunger in Oregon by ensuring eligible Oregonians get access to food stamps, supporting the Oregon Food Bank emergency network and working on public policies. This year they have developed an ambitious public policy agenda for the 2007 legislative session. â€œThis is where we can impact the root causes of hunger,â€• said Patti Whitney-Wise, executive director of the Task Force for the past nine years. â€œIt is critically important that we provide food to people in a crisis, but we also need to make sure Oregonians have opportunities and resources that allow families to thrive.â€•

Donalda Dodson, Chair of the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force, works for the Oregon Child Development Coalition. â€œOur public policy agenda will support Oregonâ€™s children,â€• said Dodson. â€œResearch has shown that children who experience hunger get sick more often and have more developmental and learning problems,â€• said Dodson.

Although Oregon has made significant improvements in reducing hunger over the past 6 years (Oregon dropped from #1 to #17 in a nationwide ranking), a large number of Oregonians continue to struggle feeding their families: 433,286 Oregonians are food insecure, meaning they are unsure they will have enough food throughout the month, and 142,000 experience hunger one or more times a year. â€œHunger is an income issue,â€• said Whitney-Wise. â€œThe rising cost of housing, health coverage and child care combined with low wages means there is simply not enough income to counterbalance household expenses. When a family must use all of their resources to pay for basic living expenses, food is the budget item that gets squeezed.â€•

The good news is we can do something about it. The Task Force is asking Oregonians to continue the spirit of giving shown during the holiday season. â€œIt was wonderful to see the outpouring of good will from communities across Oregon,â€• said Whitney-Wise. â€œPeople really want to help their neighbors, and the holidays help us reflect on our values. We invite Oregonians to multiply this good will by calling their representatives and asking them to support public polices that provide long-term solutions to ending hunger in Oregon.â€•

The Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force will be supporting the following public policies during the 2007 legislative session:

Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force Public Policy Agenda:

Increase the amount of affordable housing by supporting the Housing Allianceâ€™s proposal to raise $100 million for more housing

Support disabled Oregonians while they apply for federal benefits by creating a state SSI/SSDI bridge program for individuals

Support policy packages that strengthen family support in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program

Expand healthcare coverage to every child in Oregon

Protect Oregon consumers by instituting a 36% interest cap on all consumer loans.

Expand the refundable state Earned Income Tax Credit to eliminate state taxes on workers earning wages below the poverty level

Protect Oregonâ€™s food system by instituting a statewide Food Policy Council

Help more women, infants, children and seniors get access to fresh, healthy produce by expanding WIC and Senior Farmersâ€™ Market Coupons

Bolster the safety net by increasing funding for the Oregon Food Bank network For more information, visit www.oregonhunger.org.

To contact your representative, visit http://www.leg.state.or.us/citizenguide or call 1-800-986-1000.

The Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force was created by the Oregon Legislature in 1989 to act as a resource within government and as a statewide advocate for Oregonians who are hungry or at risk of hunger.