

The poor have heavier burden during difficult times

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At a time of deepening economic crisis and despite the manifest failure of trickle-down economics, it seems our politics remain the same: Don't ask for sacrifice, unless it's from the poor.

How else can we explain the lack of any proposal to deal with our growing budget deficit in Oregon that involves asking the more well-off among us to pay more taxes?

The silence is deafening. Where is the governor, the legislator, the political party or the editorial board that has the courage to speak up and ask that those individuals and corporations who benefited greatly from the ruinous economic policies responsible for this mess step forward and give back to the community?

As the Oregon Center for Public Policy has reminded us, we don't have a spending problem; we have a revenue problem. Cutting spending, including state spending, most economists agree will worsen our economic situation. We hear about belt tightening, but apparently not everyone's belt will need to go in a notch.

Cutting state services will hurt our poorest citizens because those services exist to help those in our communities most in need. "Across-the-board" cuts do not result in across the board distribution of sacrifice in difficult economic times. Most well-off families will never step foot in an Oregon Department of Human Services facility or be on the Oregon Health Plan.

We need more revenue, and fairness demands that we look for that increase from those most able to pay. This makes economic and moral sense. We should avoid regressive taxes and user fees that frequently and conveniently target those who have less lobbying power.

The proposals so far from the Task Force on Comprehensive Revenue and Restructuring appear timid and concentrate on feasibility and not fairness. Their recommendations should reflect what is equitable, not what is perceived to be politically palatable. The recommendations from the OCPP, contained in their excellent document "The State of Working Oregon 2008-2009," offer more than just tax restructuring proposals. They deserve more consideration by the task force and legislators.

Budgets are moral documents. More than pious platitudes ("we're all in this together"), they reflect who we really are in a democracy. When we cut services to the most needy while we let corporations pay \$10 in taxes, or ask no sacrifice from those with the highest incomes, we speak clearly about our priorities.

The budget shortfall is likely to grow even more after the March and May revenue forecasts.

In June, when the budget process is complete, will we look at the result and be proud that the burden has been shared, that those most vulnerable have been protected and that those most able have been asked to step up in the name of community? Or will we have shown that our politics have not changed?

Power and money will have prevailed and notions of community and solidarity will be packed away again, useful rhetorical devices at the beginning of legislative sessions, but ultimately ignored in the final result.

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