

## No one in Oregon should go hungry

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### Ted Kulongoski

Every year, the federal government surveys Americans about hunger. When the U.S. Census Bureau sets out to measure this problem, they ask citizens questions such as: "Did any of your children ever skip a meal because there wasn't enough money for food?" or "Have you ever been in a situation where you did not eat all day because you didn't have enough money?"

Too many Oregonians answered yes to these surveys. In fact, so many Oregonians are hungry that our state ranks No. 1 in the country in terms of its hunger problem.

Today we should all think about hunger, because today is National Hunger Awareness Day. And as we reflect on the matter, we come face to face with the reality that Oregon's hunger problem is an income problem: Too many of our residents don't have enough money to cover their costs such as housing, health care and utilities, and still put food on the table. Our hunger problem is not limited to the elderly or the non-working poor. In fact, many of our hungry are working families who just can't make ends meet.

Oregon's hunger rate was extremely high even during the state's economic boom in the 1990s. For many low-income households, the fast growth of the 1990s left them in the dust. Incomes for the poorest fifth of Oregon's families actually fell. Few low-income Oregonians benefited from the high-paying jobs created in high tech, the industry driving Oregon's economic growth. More people got jobs during the boom, but the incomes they took home were not enough to keep ahead of the rapidly rising costs of housing, health care, child care and commuting. By 2000, a full fifth of Oregon's renters were paying more than half their incomes to rent, and the poverty rate among working families with children was twice the level of the late 1970s.

The recession we are facing has exacerbated hunger. During the first year of the downturn, nearly one in eight unemployed adults in Oregon either went hungry themselves or lived with others who went hungry. The food stamp caseload skyrocketed, and thousands more Oregonians showed up at food banks, asking for help.

This is not a short-term problem. If it were, emergency efforts to get food to vulnerable families until the economy recovers might solve the problem. Such emergency efforts are absolutely vital, but not sufficient. Families with empty refrigerators and nowhere else to turn cannot wait for the economy to fully recover. These families need our help now. But in the longer-term, the key to solving hunger will be releasing our most vulnerable families from the income squeeze.

To succeed in the fight against hunger, we will need to build an economy that produces more family wage jobs. My economic development package is designed to stimulate the growth of just these sorts of jobs. For example, I hope soon to sign a transportation bill that will provide 5,000

family-wage jobs for the next 10 years. But we also need to invest in affordable housing and health care, so low-income Oregonians don't need to choose between medicine, housing and food.

Hunger is an issue for every one of us. Underfed people cannot be productive members of the workforce. Malnourished children cannot master all the information and skills they will need to sustain Oregon's progress in the years to come. Solving our hunger problem is part of building a strong future for all Oregonians. I encourage all of our citizens to get involved: Give time, give money, give canned goods and give your support to programs that help combat hunger. Together, we can beat this problem, one mouth at a time.

Ted Kulongoski is governor of Oregon. For more information, check the Web site at [www.governor.oregon.gov](http://www.governor.oregon.gov).

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