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Fired Up and Ready to Go End Poverty

By Charles Sheketoff Special to Salem-News.com

Invest in the Public Good Through Fair Budget and Tax Policies. The state's revenue shortfall threatens critical public structures. This revenue problem must be met with a revenue solution, not cuts to vital public services.

(SILVERTON, Ore.) - The morning after the election, I watched a video of Barack Obama telling how, on a rainy morning last June, Edith Childs of Greenwood, South Carolina, energized a room full of people with her chant, "Fired up! Ready to go!" The chant became a signature of the Obama campaign.

With the chant still echoing in my head, I turned to a blog post by an advocate I've admired for years, John Bouman, president of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. Noting that "the State of Poverty is America's most populated state -- 37 million people," the Shriver Center recommended a 12-point plan to confront poverty.

In reading over the Shriver Center plan, I realized how relevant it is not just to the new Obama administration but also to the new Oregon legislature.

About one in eight Oregonians today lives below the federal poverty line, the same share as 40 years ago. If assembled in one place, Oregon's poor would comprise the state's second largest city, bigger than Eugene and Salem combined.

Those numbers may seem depressing, but the Shriver Center's plan got me fired up and ready to go.

Here's the Shriver Center's 12-point plan and the steps Oregon's 2009 legislature can take to tackle each of them head on:

Strengthen the Legal Foundation for Civil Rights and Racial Justice. Improving access to lawyers for our poor would help strengthen the legal foundation for civil rights and racial justice.

Establish Affordable Quality Health Care for All. The legislature should breathe life back into the Oregon Health Plan so that it can get closer to its goal of coverage for all working poor adults. Add to that expanding coverage to all Oregon children and we would at least be making progress toward affordable health coverage for all.

Guarantee Economic Safety for People with Employment Challenges. Oregon's unemployment insurance system needs to be brought into the 21st century by adding coverage for part-time and contingent workers. We also need to enact paid sick leave and family leave insurance.

Invest in the Public Good Through Fair Budget and Tax Policies. The state's revenue shortfall threatens critical public structures. This revenue problem must be met with a revenue solution, not cuts to vital public services.

Preserving our Nation's Rental Housing. We should realign our public investments in housing to support affordable rental and owner-occupied homes. The legislature should redirect resources that now subsidize wealthy individuals who purchase large homes to poor and near-poor families who do not have the affordable housing they need to allow them to succeed in life.

Create Redemptive Opportunities for People with Criminal Records. Voters said "no" to a draconian "lock 'em up" scheme on the November ballot. The legislature should respond by providing treatment and job training opportunities that help reduce violence and recidivism and increase community safety.

Increase Economic Mobility Through Lifelong Education. Intel has noted that one reason the company moved to Oregon in the 1970s was Oregon's "K-life education system." Investment in an education-for-life system, from preschool through adult education, would enhance economic mobility for Oregonians.

Link Economic Development to Workforce Development Opportunities. Our economic development practices need transparency and accountability so that we do not squander resources on jobs that pay little and offer few benefits. We also can't afford to give more tax breaks to businesses that lay off their Oregon workers and leave the state.

Advance Low-Wage Workers by Making Work Pay. It's time to increase the Earned Income Tax Credit to make work pay for low-wage workers with children.

Build and Protect Assets for Financial Stability and Growth. We can make sure people being assisted in public benefits programs are allowed to acquire assets, and we can develop mechanisms so more Oregonians can save for retirement.

Protect Access to the American Dream for Immigrants and Refugees. All Oregonians ultimately pay more for health care when we deny health care to people because of their immigration status. Barring college doors for undocumented students penalizes innocent victims of a failed immigration system and destroys the American Dream.



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Ensure Economic Opportunity and Safety for Women and Girls. We should build safer and more affordable housing for victims of sexual and domestic violence, create a better trained workforce in the childcare industry and develop a more affordable childcare system.

These goals are achievable. I'm "Fired up! Ready to go!" and confront poverty. Are you?

Charles Sheketoff is executive director of the Oregon Center for Public Policy. He can be reached at csheketoff@ocpp.org.

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Henry Clay Ruark November 27, 2008 7:44 pm (*Pacific time*)

To all: If you need any further spark to fire you up, make sure to see the faces and body language of those finding a good T-dinner at public facilities. Can't miss that standard story on Oregon tv"news" --and when you do see it AGAIN, ask yourself that unavoidable, inevitable question sure to occur to you: "WHY should this ever be happening in a nation endowed as this one has long been ?" That might even add some fuel to help the spark take off and set flame where needed...

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