

Let Us Count Our Blessings

At least seventeen states that are experiencing or projecting future deficits have chosen to make cuts that will hurt their most vulnerable residents. We thank God that Washington State legislators rejected this course of action in the session just ended. Instead, legislation was passed that contributes to the well-being of our residents and the environment. Members of the Religious Coalition for the Common Good (RCCG) are pleased to commend the Governor and the House and Senate leadership for their efforts to make legislation passed in this short session add value to our common life together.

While some states have cut health care, especially for low-income children, Governor Gregoire said to a delegation of religious leaders before the session began, "Not on my watch!" In fact, the legislature added funding for mental health services for low-income children not covered by Medicaid. While the state of Maine is removing 7,000 mentally-ill and elderly adults from Medicare and California's governor is proposing cuts amounting to \$787 per K-12 student, Washington has stepped up to making up for past cuts in care for the elderly and teachers salaries.. In the face of decreasing revenues the legislature recognized the need to invest in people, to help create stability in families and yet maintain a healthy reserve fund.

The following results show significant successes in passing RCCG priorities:

- **Affordable & Accessible Housing**
 - Additional \$70M for the Housing Trust Fund bringing it up \$200M.
 - \$6M for the Washington Families Fund and \$2.5M for Transitional Housing, Operating, & Rent (THOR) program.
 - Passed a Condominium conversion bill that will help displaced renters..
- **Affordable & Accessible Healthcare**
 - Commitment to funding State Children's Health Insurance Program even with uncertainty about the Federal regulations regarding funding..
 - \$2.2M in subsidies for low-wage workers in small businesses to access affordable health care plans accessible in a year.
- **Reducing Poverty**
 - Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients gained the first increase since 1995 for housing assistance. The 3% increase in the amount of \$7.8M will come out of the federal TANF dollars, not from the state general fund..
 - Food Stamp eligibility was approved to go from 150% of the Federal Poverty Level to 200% at a cost of \$1.1M. This will increase eligible families by 23,000.
- **Environmental Stewardship**
 - Climate Action and Green Jobs bill passed and was funded at \$1.9M to train and transition workers to clean energy jobs.
 - \$1.5M for Local Farms/Health Kids will help small to mid-size farms supply food banks and schools with locally grown produce.
 - \$300,000 will implement the Urban Forestry (Evergreen Cities) bill.
- **Public Safety & Restorative Justice**
 - A compromise was reached on creating an independent corrections ombudsman. Instead, a citizen's advisory council was established in the Department of Correction head's office.
- **Tax Fairness**
 - \$1.25M to set up the Working Families Tax Credit , which would become operational in 2009 if the legislature approves it next session.
- **Compassionate Immigration Reform**
 - The Governor signed the executive order creating the New American's Initiative Policy Council to spur immigrant integration. The Initiative, which is funded at \$344K will help provide naturalization assistance for legal permanent residents eligible for citizenship.

We fell short of accomplishing our entire agenda. Some of the issues that either weren't addressed or died in the process are living wage requirements for public contracts, reduction of legal financial obligations resulting from criminal judgments, development of an oral health program for low-income seniors. A complete report on the RCCG priorities can be accessed at www.thewac.org.