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Oregonians Mired in Poverty and Lacking in Health Insurance Despite Income Gains for Typical Household

Full-Time Work Fails to Lift Families Out of Poverty While the Typical Household Fails to Rebound from the 2001 Recession

While the typical Oregon household's income rose in 2005-06 by $1,667 over 2004-05, Oregon was unable to reduce poverty or the percentage of Oregonians lacking health insurance, according to data released today by the U.S. Census Bureau and analyzed by the Silverton-based Oregon Center for Public Policy (OCPP), a nonpartisan research institute.

"The typical Oregon household has seen their income improve somewhat," said Michael Leachman, a policy analyst with the public policy research institute, "but has not recovered from the recession after several years of economic growth." Leachman noted that Oregon's median household income in 2005-06 was $46,349, down $3,100 in inflation-adjusted dollars from the pre-recession level of $49,449 in 1999-00.

"We've been on the upside of an economic cycle, but it has not been strong enough to heal the pain caused by the last recession or to improve the plight of the poor," Leachman added. "As the Governor and lawmakers prepare for the inevitable next recession, today's news should focus their attention on protecting and helping low- and middle-income families," said Leachman.

"Oregon needs a plan and a commitment to reduce poverty," said Charles Sheketoff, executive director of the Oregon Center for Public Policy. The Census data shows that poverty overall remains the same as in last year's report. According to the Center, households with two or more related people living together saw their poverty rate decline, while the poverty rate among children and seniors did not improve.

"The percentage of families with children who are poor despite full-time work saw no improvement and remains more than double the level of the early 1980s," said Leachman. In 2005-06, 6.3 percent of full-time working families with children were poor despite their work effort, up from 2.7 percent in 1979-81, according to the Center's analysis of Census data.

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"When full-time work doesn't lift families with children out of poverty and is twice the level of the early 1980s, we refuse to put a positive spin on the state of Oregon's economy," said Sheketoff. "Oregon needs a focused commitment to enact public policies that will reverse this disturbing trend," he added.

While nationally the percentage of Americans lacking health insurance rose, in Oregon it remained statistically the same in 2005-06 as in 2004-05 for the overall population and for children. According to OCPP, two years ago Oregon's growth in uninsurance was the largest in the nation.

"We may have stemmed the rising tide but we're still seeing too many Oregonians who don't have health insurance," said Leachman.

In 2005-06, 16.8 percent of Oregonians – 616,000 Oregonians – lacked health insurance for a year or more, up from 12.8 percent of Oregonians in 2000-2001. About one in nine Oregon children – 103,000 kids – went without insurance for a year or more in 2005-06.

"The Governor and the Legislature's plan to expand coverage for uninsured children will put Oregon in the winners' column in future years if Oregonians vote 'yes' this fall," said Sheketoff, referring to Measure 50, the Healthy Kids plan on the ballot this November.

The Oregon Center for Public Policy uses research and analysis to advance policies and practices that improve the economic and social opportunities of all Oregonians.

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