

Weather reports point to a dark winter in Oregon

The news in Oregon hasn't been good lately. In fact, it's been downright depressing.

The latest U.S. Census shows Oregon — and the rest of the nation — have more poor people. While Oregon's poverty rate remains steady at 11.3 percent, the state has 5,000 more residents living below the poverty income line. The median income has dropped by \$1,289 to \$41,816 since 2001.

Apparently, Bush's tax cuts haven't trickled down yet.

More than 40,000 Oregonians have been dropped from the Oregon Health Plan because of state budget cuts. There are now 511,000 Oregonians who lack medical insurance. National-ly, that figure is 43.6 million, up 2.4 million from 2001.

With government trimming Medicaid and Medicare coverage, more doctors are turning away uninsured patients. Medical costs continue spiraling upward beyond the means of the poor and elderly.

Children First for Oregon has come out with a report giving the state a C-minus for the well-being of Oregon children. The state received an F (as in failure) for financial stability for families with children and a D for children's health.

The proportion of children younger than 18 who live in poverty in Oregon rose to 17 percent, from 14 percent two years ago.

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Infant mortality is on the rise. Fewer children have medical insurance. The campaign to immunize more children against preventable diseases has stalled.

"Poor grades in these areas sound the alarm that trouble lies ahead in other categories (such as crime and unemployment) unless something is done to reverse the trend," said the Children First report.

Meanwhile, children who want to get ahead have seen doors slammed in their faces. Either enrollment has been capped or the cost of college is now prohibitive. Colleges have hiked tuition by 19 percent.

It's hard to understand, then, why the 2003 Legislature cut funding for state universities by 8 percent and for community colleges by 6 percent. Oregon today pays for just 38 percent of the cost of a student's college education, compared with 69 percent in 1980.

Maybe the sky isn't falling, but the clouds are getting darker. It could be a long, cold winter.