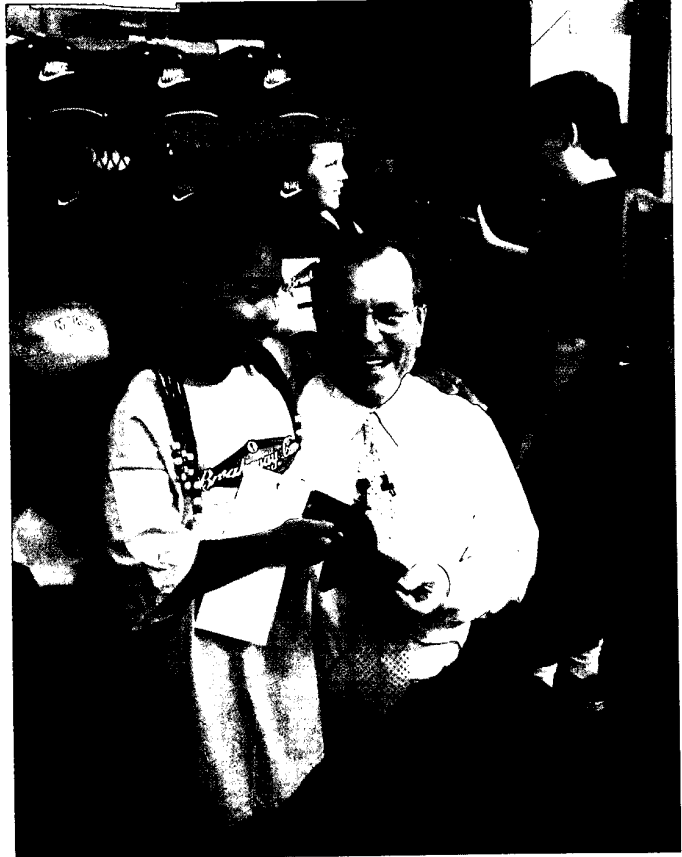


Putting Kids First

An Interview with Gov. Kulongoski about his Children's Charter for Oregon

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During his 2002 campaign, Gov. Ted Kulongoski was frequently interviewed at a bowling alley, bowling ball in hand, pins clattering in the background. Members of the press and the public likely concluded that this was the candidate's attempt to present himself as a regular Joe, a down-to-earth kind of guy. "Everybody kept asking, 'what's your bowling average?'" the governor recalls.

But Kulongoski wasn't looking to come across as the guy next door and he wasn't looking for kudos on his bowling handicap. Rather, he was trying to make a point about community – and how, over the past few decades, we've lost much of our connection with our neighbors and our co-workers. He'd read the book *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam (Simon & Schuster, 2000) and felt that the solitary bowling metaphor was as good as any to represent, as he explains it, "what has happened to us as a society because we no longer bowl together, we no longer go to clubs ... how it has fragmented our social bonds."

In *Bowling Alone*, author Putnam presents evidence that the amount of "social capital" that a society has – that is, the extent to which residents join organizations, volunteer, vote and trust each other – is directly related to the welfare of its children and other indicators of social well-being. And Putnam suggests that "we Americans need to reconnect with one another."

Kulongoski agrees. He feels that our disconnect – the fact that we *are* bowling alone – is a key

reason behind our failure to live up to our duties as members of our communities. Primary among those responsibilities is our collective obligation to children. He believes in the old African proverb, "it takes a village to raise a child." "It's premised on the idea that the children in our community belong to all of us," says Kulongoski. "It's not just my child," explains the governor, "it's all our children that we have to pay attention to." And we aren't doing that, he says.



"I think children need an adult in their lives now more than ever in the history of this country."

—Gov. Ted Kulongoski