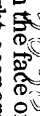


Working families in jeopardy as legislation stalls


In the face of a spiraling deficit and a tight economy, the U.S. Senate has drawn a line in the sand for our country's children. With bipartisan support, the Senate overwhelmingly voted to increase child care funds by \$6 billion over the next five years. Oregon's own Senators, Gordon Smith and Ron Wyden, along with 76 of their colleagues voted for this important investment in working families.

We commend the Senate for moving forward to support working families, but we are concerned that progress on child care funding has stalled over other debates connected to the broader welfare reauthorization bill. We must not lose this momentum to support working families and the economy. The Senate needs to resolve its differences and move forward on this important legislation.

Once the Senate agrees on its version of the child care funding bill, differences with the House of Representatives' bill will need to be worked out in conference. Unfortunately, the House legislation already passed does not support families. The House did not allocate sufficient dollars to help eligible working families with their child care costs. It also increased work requirements for welfare

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Comment

parents, further increasing the need for child care assistance.

One of the toughest challenges for working families is finding safe, affordable child care. The annual cost of toddler care ranges from \$4,000 to \$7,000 a year; the cost of infant care is even higher. An Oregon family with both parents working full-time at minimum wage jobs earns \$29,400 a year, thus one toddler in care can cost up to 24 percent of their income. This percentage is much higher for a single-parent household.

Two-thirds of Oregon's low-income working families are unable to find child care they can afford. This is a serious economic issue for the state. Affordable, quality child care is an economic necessity for all working families. It is also an essential component of our state's strategies to turn around the economy and help families make the successful transition from welfare to work.

Parents with access to affordable, quality care are more productive at work, have lower absenteeism and ex-

perience higher morale on the job. And let's not forget, good child care helps to ensure that children are safe while their parents are at work. In addition, child care providers are a significant component of small businesses throughout the state. Studies have shown that every dollar spent on child care generates up to \$2 in the state or local economy.

Because of the Senate's action, nearly \$68 million of additional child care money would come into the state, providing thousands of Oregon working families with increased access to quality, affordable child care. Members of Congress must put their differences aside and seize this opportunity to make the smart investments in child care needed to keep children safe and help parents achieve the economic stability essential to the well being of all Oregon's children.

Sue Sheppardson is a volunteer at Bend's KIDS Center and is a board member of Children First for Oregon, the state's leading voice for children since 1991. A nonprofit, nonpartisan group, Children First advocates for change through public education, research and strengthening community voices on behalf of Oregon's children and families.