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Summary

At the core of our American tradition is a dynamic citizenry that responds creatively and efficiently to people in need. Conversely, government offers one-size-fits-all solutions. Further, the more government does, the more it stifles citizens and organizations from acting in private, voluntary concert to achieve community goals.

Word count: 567

“If government does not provide for those in need, who will? The answer: We will, as we always have.”

Build community, not dependence

by *Kathryn Hickok and Kurt T. Weber*

In the spring of 2003 a great sense of community was developing in the Portland area. When Portland’s public schools announced they might close for a couple of weeks, parents began exploring their options and discussed privately hiring a teacher. Several local organizations pulled together and brainstormed educational opportunities to make up for lost class time.

Then, Portland’s mayor and the Multnomah County chair forked over additional taxpayer dollars to keep the schools open. Though many cheered, the reality was that government action killed the growing private, voluntary efforts to provide for the needs of children.

In the debate over Measure 30, many wonder: If government does not provide for those in need, who will? The answer: *We will, as we always have.*

In the early 1800s, French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville came to the United States. He observed that Americans took it upon themselves as individual citizens to support one another. In *Democracy in America* he noted: “I have often seen Americans make really great sacrifices for the common good, and I have noticed a hundred cases in which, when help was needed, they hardly ever failed to give each other trusty support.”

De Tocqueville observed that political associations are only “one small part of the immense number of different types of associations found” in America. “Americans of all ages, all stations in life,” he wrote, “are forever forming associations... of a thousand different types.... In every case, at the head of any new undertaking, where in France you would find the government..., in the United States you are sure to find an association.”

He also sagely warned, “The more government takes the place of associations, the more will individuals lose the idea of forming [them] and need government to come to their help.”

A dynamic citizenry is at the core of our American tradition. Whereas government provides one-size-fits-all solutions to the challenges facing our communi-

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ties, charities and other community initiatives respond immediately, efficiently, and personally to the unique needs of our own neighborhoods—and of the world.

Oregonians contribute financially, or give of their time and talent, to countless private associations to help those in need. Mercy Corps International helps people in Oregon and abroad build secure, productive, and just communities. Habitat for Humanity assists low-income people to build affordable homes. Birth-right provides material, emotional, and medical support for pregnant mothers. Union Gospel Mission feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, and supports those struggling to be free of addiction. Ronald McDonald House provides a place for families to stay when their children are hospitalized away from home. SMART (Start Making A Reader Today) asks volunteers to read to a needy child every week. And, of course, the American Red Cross is always first on the scene, lending a hand in times of need.

On February 3, 2004 voters will decide whether or not to uphold the legislature's \$1 billion tax increase. We have read editorial after news article that the measure's defeat would hurt Oregon's poor, elderly, and children. However, what these editorials do not say is that high taxes and big government stifle creative community solutions for which Americans have been known for 200 years.

A society of free, independent individuals and strong communities is the result of private, voluntary associations. Instead of furthering dependence on government bureaucracy, take action today and give to a private charity that provides effective and personal help.

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