



Friends Committee on Washington State Public Policy (FCWPP)
— A Quaker Organization

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Secure Society Campaign

Every resident of Washington State wants a society that is reasonably secure. Among other things, we want to be secure from crime, secure in our ability to access needed health care, secure in the wholesomeness of our food and environment, secure in our sources of income, and secure in our personal privacy and liberty. The job of policy makers is to assure that our laws, programs, institutions, and systems meet these basic needs, which are the foundation for a healthy culture and active, creative individuals.

A. How Well Are We Meeting Our Basic Needs In Washington?

1. Are we secure from crime?

Studies show that more public safety is gained through education, prevention, and treatment programs to improve the participants' income and their commitment to family and community than from incarceration, which frequently has the opposite effect. Yet for more than a decade Washington has been steadily increasing prison sentences, prison beds, and the share of its general fund devoted to prisons, while treatment programs and the share of the budget available for other basic services and public needs have been decreasing. The governor's proposed budget provides for additional costly prison expansion.

2. Are we secure in our ability to access needed health care?

Washington's health care system is in crisis. Over 600,000 Washington residents have no health care coverage. Individual plans are unavailable in most counties, while many employers are reducing coverage for their workers due to rising costs. In addition, both Medicaid for the poorest of the poor and the state's Basic Health Plan for the working poor are being cut back because of the public revenue crisis, rather than being expanded to include the many uncovered families and individuals.

3. Are we secure in the wholesomeness of our food and environment?

It is a serious concern that known carcinogens are accumulating in our food chain and being ingested by people when they eat and drink. As our population grows, traditional land development policies have also resulted in increasing water and air pollution, as well as loss of open space and habitat. Wild salmon often return home to streams drained dry or chemically hostile. Current water resource laws and under-funded programs fail to support timely actions and jeopardize our economy as well as wildlife recovery. Washington's natural systems are being damaged daily.

4. Are we secure in our sources of income?

While many in Washington are well to do and our per capita income exceeds the national average, in 2002 we lead the nation in unemployment, and ranked 2nd in hunger. Despite these realities, the governor's proposed budget eliminates welfare benefits for unemployable adults, and makes other cuts in services to the poor, many of whom were previously employed and currently depend on public programs, including many services to children.

5. Are we secure in our personal privacy and liberty?

Washingtonians take pride in their civil liberties and privacy, and our state constitution has been held to provide even greater individual rights than the US constitution. Yet the federal government is putting pressure on state officials to authorize wiretapping and to adopt or in other ways cooperate with anti-terrorist measures that would violate traditional liberties. While this pressure was rebuffed in part by the 2002 legislature, privacy and liberty are under continued assault by a government determined to examine our every communication and action, as well as to expand the death penalty despite growing evidence of its use against innocent persons.

B. What Can We Do To Achieve A More Secure Society?

1. Revenue Reform

Achieving a secure society is a matter of will and resources. We are a rich state, with more than adequate resources to assure security for our residents, while reserving ample funds for the myriad activities that enrich our lives and enhance our diversity and creativity. We simply need the will to allocate resources to effective and efficient programs to provide that security.

Our current revenue system is both regressive and inadequate. The poor pay a greater share of their income than the wealthy; businesses pay according to their gross revenue, which has little to do with profitability. Providing adequate revenues under an unjust tax system is unpopular and difficult.

Washington's current revenue system should be reformed to provide a progressive or at least proportional system, by adopting as its foundation the almost universally utilized tax on income, while eliminating the unfair business and occupations tax and reducing reliance on regressive sales taxes and residential property taxes. Tax rates under a reformed structure should be set at adequate levels to provide for a reasonably secure society.

2. Crime and Punishment Reform

It is clear to students of the system that prison doesn't reform; it more often deforms. The "feel good," "toss-'em in jail" approach to punishment over the last decade has proven a costly and ineffective alternative to instilling a commitment to society and offering tools for success. Additional revenues need to be provided for prevention and intervention programs, and for most offenders, lengthy and expensive jail and prison sentences need to be reduced and replaced by treatment and community sanctions that restore their responsibility to society.

3. **Health Care Reform**

Reasonable health care must be available to all Washington residents. Because we depend on multiple, competing insurers, many of our health care dollars are inefficiently expended in sales and administrative costs, rather than in delivery of service. A single public trust fund should be established to administer a universal health care system utilizing private health care practitioners, with open enrollment for both employed and unemployed residents, and their families.

4. **Environmental Health**

Ecology programs should be adequately funded to assure responsible monitoring of toxins and pollutants in our environment, to enforce existing regulations, and to propose new protections when needed. Growth management and other programs to limit loss of our natural resources and open space through inappropriate development should be supported and, as needed, strengthened. Washington's water resource laws should be reviewed and a more rational system of allocating water resources adopted, in order to protect local economies, endangered species, and the livability of our communities.

5. **A Living Income**

Every Washington resident deserves the security of a living income, including public assistance for those unable to work or to find work, and their children. Tax revenues must be adequate to fully fund needed assistance programs, and for job creation and retention programs.

6. **Civil Rights and Liberties**

Fundamental rights and liberties, including privacy, due process, and political dissent need to be protected from government overreaching. Care must be taken to avoid arbitrary actions on the basis of race, religion, national origin, or other inappropriate status, as well as irreversible criminal penalties such as capital punishment.

A secure society should be the right of every Washington State resident and the goal of every public official. We have the resources to assure reasonable security for all our residents. Our challenge is to reform and sustain our revenue system and programs to achieve this goal.

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