

# PUBLIC LIFE

January 2006 – Volume 3, Issue 1  
Owensboro, Kentucky

# Advocate

## DENTAL CARE for poor youth “a huge, huge need”

Low Medicaid reimbursements and lack of  
insurance complicate access

**Framing the Issue:**  
The State Budget

**Being Gay in Owensboro**





# About our Editorial Board



## Rodney B. Berry

Rodney is president of the Public Life Foundation of Owensboro. He joined the foundation in 2000 following twelve years with RiverPark (performing arts) Center. His volunteer and civic experience includes work in education, health care, youth, social services, tourism, and community development. He is a graduate of Western Kentucky University.



## Dave Boeyink

Dave is Associate Professor of Journalism and Director of Media Studies, Poynter Center for the Study of Ethics and American Institutions, Indiana University. He holds a B.A. degree from Central College and an M.T.S. and Ph.D. from Harvard University. From 1978-87, he was Editorial Page Editor for the *Messenger-Inquirer*. He has published articles in *Journal of Religious Ethics*, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, *Newspaper Journal*, and *Journalism Quarterly*.



## Fran Ellers

Fran works as a writer, editor, and communications consultant. She is a former reporter with the Louisville *Courier-Journal* and was a frequent panelist on Kentucky Educational Television's "Comment on Kentucky." Her clients include the Public Life Foundation of Owensboro, University of Kentucky Center for Rural Health, and the Kentucky League of Cities.



## John S. Hager

John established the Public Life Foundation of Owensboro in 1996 following the sale of the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer* to the Belo Corporation (Dallas, TX). A graduate of Princeton University and the University of Michigan College of Law, he was a practicing attorney for 19 years prior to returning to the family newspaper in 1973. He has been involved in numerous civic initiatives, including a lead role in the establishment of the Owensboro Community College. In 1996, the Kentucky Press Association honored him with its "most valuable member" award. He was named to the Kentucky Journalism Hall of Fame in 2002.



## Ed Staats

Ed served The Associated Press for 41 years, as a reporter, editor and administrator in 10 AP offices, including the AP's headquarters in New York. He retired in mid-2002 ending a career that bridged the print, broadcast, cable, and online news businesses. At his retirement, he was in charge of AP's Kentucky operations, a position he had held since the mid-1980's. He is a member of the Kentucky Journalism Hall of Fame.

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## Public dialogue and the smoking ordinance



by Rodney Berry

Daviess County government's recent action on a smoking ordinance serves as a valuable case study in grassroots democracy.

The initiative was rooted in growing concerns over the dangers of secondhand smoke and sparked by sporadic regulatory successes across the nation and state, most recently in Lexington, Louisville and Georgetown.

Proponents of the ordinance based their position on credible research and surveys by

independent polling firms. While acknowledging legitimate business concerns that could be affected by an ordinance, they stayed focused on the public interest – as opposed to any private or financial interest.

While this is a virtuous framework, the process would have been better served if information had been assembled by a third party or a task force representing diverse perspectives. As it was, the released information was associated with groups that had already staked out a position. Opponents assumed that the material was slanted.

Without malicious intent, zestful advocates leapfrogged the vital step of deliberation. The process would have benefited from a series of neighborhood and community forums to engage the public, stakeholders and advocates in

dialogue. This would not have removed emotion from the debate, but it would have increased understanding of the facts, issues and options. It would also have facilitated mutual respect among people representing opposing points of view.

Our foundation offered to conduct a se-

ries of forums on the proposed ordinance. We even prepared a dialogue guide for that purpose. But advocates were too focused on selling their proposal to endorse such a notion. In hindsight, we should have proceeded with forums on our own.

It was encouraging that the Daviess County Fiscal Court welcomed unfettered public comment following the official ordinance readings and prior to the vote. But ground rules also have a place. Some audience members spoke several times, and

some spoke for an unreasonably long period of time. The public hearings remained civil, but some behaviors following the vote should not have escaped exposure – for example, when a vehement opponent of the ordinance accosted, maligned, and blew cigarette smoke in the face of a school nurse who had spoken in favor of the ordinance.

Grassroots democracy is not always pretty, but it need not get ugly.

In the end, the fiscal court demonstrated respect for all points of view. Each official carefully explained his rationale in coming to judgment, a judgment that all would conclude was an informed one.

We salute all those who took an interest, sought good information, stayed focused on the common good, and devoted time and

energy to such an important community decision. ■



**The public hearings remained civil, but some behaviors that occurred following the vote should not have escaped exposure – for example, when a vehement opponent of the ordinance accosted, maligned, and blew cigarette smoke in the face of a school nurse who had spoken in favor of the ordinance.**

## Contributors

### Benjamin Hoak



Ben's first *Public Life Advocate* assignment examines a growing concern among school nurses, educators and social workers: the prevalence of youth dental problems and the alarming shortage of available options to address the need.

Ben studied biology and English at Kentucky Wesleyan College. He is a former middle school teacher and a fellow of the World Journalism Institute. Ben writes for the *Messenger-Inquirer* in special publications.

### Charly Wood



Charly says that it's true what Adam said (in the article): "If you get to know us, we're just like you." Charly's in-depth examination of the experiences of gays and lesbians in Owensboro is tragic, touching and hopeful.

Charly is a retired college English teacher, small town newspaper person, former community theater producer and co-editor of a poetry magazine.

### Chad Gesser



Chad somehow managed to produce more data for us to chew on amidst the chaos of a recent change in residence.

He coordinates institutional research at Owensboro Community and Technical College. He has a keen interest in Robert Putnam's theories of citizen engagement as

examined in *Bowling Alone*.



# DENTAL CARE for poor youth “a huge, huge need”

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Low Medicaid reimbursements and lack of insurance complicate access

*By Benjamin Hoak*

**P**ain and heat pulse from the teenager's jaw, the tooth rotting from the inside and so sensitive that the slightest touch causes agonizing pain. Blood leaks from the aching tooth; a metallic taste feels cold in his mouth.

His high school nurse takes him home. The tooth has to come out, but he can't go to the dentist because he doesn't have insurance and local dental offices won't take his medical card for an extraction. The closest dentist who can help him is an hour and a half away.

It's too costly to get to that dentist. There's only one option left. He grabs a pair of pliers and he would grit his teeth against what's coming, but they already hurt too much. He yanks the tooth out, his fingers white-knuckled around the pliers.

## **The problem**

Sound farfetched? It's a true story for this student from Owensboro High School (who is not identified so as not to embarrass him). It's also true for thousands of other young people in Owensboro and Daviess County who lack access to dental care and suffer as a result. "It's such a huge, huge need," said Beth Murphy, director of the Family Resource Center at Foust Elementary School.

"The problem's almost so big it's really intimidating to get your arms around it," added JAT Mountjoy, director of the Daviess County Community Access Project and the Reach Clinic.

According to a Kentucky Youth Advocates study based on data from 2004, 10,780 children in Daviess County under the age of 21 were eligible for Medicaid or KCHIP (the Kentucky Children's

Health Insurance Program). Of that number, only 3,440, or 32 percent, received any dental care. More than two-thirds of eligible patients went untreated. The study reveals similar numbers across the state – only 33 percent of Medicaid- or KCHIP-eligible recipients under 21 receiving dental care.

Out of 378 students at Foust, 289 qualify for a medical card (given to Medicaid recipients to help cover health care costs). Even so, more than half have never been treated by a dentist, Murphy said.

Part of the problem is lack of access. Most dentists won't accept the medical card for payment. Murphy estimates there are fewer than five in Daviess County who do.

The main reason is because reimbursement fees for dental procedures are so low that most dentists will lose money by accepting the card, they say. Mark Fort, an Owensboro dentist who has practiced for 22 years, used to take the medical card, but currently doesn't. The reimbursement rate runs from 35 to 50 percent of his fee, depending on the procedure the patient needs, he said. "By the time you count in the overhead involved, at very best, it's a break-even proposition."

Carol Braun, another Owensboro dentist, but one who has taken the card since her practice began in 1986, understands the dilemma. Dentistry, she said, "is a business as well as a health care provider. The last fee increase (for reimbursements) for us was 12 years ago. Even though our overhead changes every year, that's not a consideration. To not have the increase is tough to take." Braun said she sees three or four Medicaid patients a day.

Broken appointments lead to a further loss of money for dentists.

“My biggest problem was a failure for (Medicaid patients) to make their appointments,” Fort said. “You would schedule them and sometimes they would show up and sometimes they wouldn’t.” Fort and other dentists aren’t sure of all the factors involved, but say reasons for the high no-show rate among Medicaid patients include transportation issues and a fear of going to the dentist.

Carol Hulsey, another Owensboro dentist, also used to accept the medical card, but eventually decided to stop seeing patients when they didn’t show up for appointments. She ended up with only one Medicaid patient.

So where do poor children go when they’re hurting? What about the nine-year-old who needs four molars pulled, the high school student who needs dentures or the young Hispanic child who doesn’t have a medical card but needs two crowns, three extractions and six fillings (\$1,500 worth of work)? Short of going to the emergency room (which is happening more often now, according to Braun), all of these real-life local examples have to struggle to find dental care.

They do have advocates. Renee Ireland, health coordinator for Daviess County Public Schools, tries to help kids on a case-by-case basis. When she discovers a need, she peruses her Rolodex, tracking down every resource she can think of. She’s sending the nine-year-old to an oral surgeon in Hopkinsville and drawing on three different sources to partially pay for three root canals for a high school girl.

The Owensboro Rotary Club has a youth fund for such needs. The Goodfellows Club can occasionally provide funds and some family resource centers have welfare funds available. As helpful as these sources are, though, they’re limited. They don’t address the larger issue.

“We need more dentists to come in and help with this need,” Ireland said. “We don’t have the resources, we don’t have the places to take them (patients).”

“There isn’t enough money to meet all the needs,” Murphy added.

The Medicaid numbers also don’t include a large population that falls through the cracks – the working poor. There are many citizens, Murphy said, who earn enough money that they are not eligible for Medicaid, but not so much that they can afford dental care.

### Small steps

All of which leaves many local families in quite a predicament. They can’t afford dental care, but after years of neglect, it’s often necessary. Solutions are slowly coming. The process begins, many say, with education. “Dental care is not seen (to be) as important as immunizations,” Murphy said. “Preventative care is not pushed. They only go when it hurts.”

If cavities that require simple fillings aren’t treated early, the teeth will rot from the inside out, requiring a root canal or an extraction. Preventive care would save huge amounts of time and money.

“Early prevention and education is the key,” Fort said. “If you can catch some of this stuff early, if you can foster some good dental health care attitudes and make an impression on school-age children, perhaps in a generation, we can cut it down some.”

The state government and local schools are making efforts in this direction. The Dental Health Initiative, passed four years ago by the state legislature, approved \$8,000 for a sealant program in Daviess County and Owensboro Public Schools.

The program provides sealants for children’s teeth to protect them from disease and decay. Before dentists can apply the sealant, though, they must fill cavities, pull teeth and make sure the mouth is healthy.

To determine which children need treatment, Murphy or Ireland organizes a screening day at an elementary school. A note goes home to parents to obtain permission for their child’s teeth to be checked. Then a dentist such as Fort, who screens kids at Sorgho Elementary School, will conduct a brief visual exam using a handheld mirror. The dentist will look for large cavities or badly decayed teeth and assess if the child has even been to a dentist. Those who need treatment will get appointments with a local dentist through the program.

Murphy and Ireland are grateful for the help, but funds from the DHI will eventually run out and the grant is not renewable.

To complement the sealant program, Foust Elementary School has instituted a toothbrush program. Each classroom is equipped with a toothbrush rack that holds a brush, its cover and a small tube of toothpaste for each child. Teachers encourage their students to brush their teeth at least once a day while they’re at school in hopes that the kids will carry the habit home.

Another educational issue deals with what kids eat and drink. “One of the biggest problems we’ve got right now, in all society, is the consumption of soft drinks,” Fort said. “I see a lot of children from all socioeconomic levels that have a lot of decay. The problem is having one (a soft drink) in your hand all day long.”

Another educational issue deals with what kids eat and drink. “One of the biggest problems we’ve got right now, in all society, is the consumption of soft drinks,” Fort said. “I see a lot of children from all socioeconomic levels that have a lot of decay. The problem is having one (a soft drink) in your hand all day long.”

### Existing clinic services

For immediate, pressing, painful needs, a screening won’t help. Children need to see a dentist.

One idea is to create additional dental clinics specifically for the poor of Daviess County. One such clinic already exists, but it is staffed by volunteers and its capacity, especially for young people, is limited. A small group of local dentists established the Christian Dental Mission about 10 years ago in a small house just off Scherm Road. The Daviess-McLean Baptist Association outfitted the house as a fully functional clinic,

complete with two dental chairs and an x-ray machine.

Hulsey has been involved with the project since the beginning and is the outgoing president of the clinic. She said it is open once a week for a morning or an evening session. The clinic is staffed with five or six local dentists, a couple of hygienists and several volunteers from the community.

The Help Office sends qualifying patients to the clinic. Hulsey said the clinic treats only patients whose income is below the poverty line and who are employed, recently unemployed or on disability. The clinic was getting so many calls for help that it had to arbitrarily pick the poverty line as a cutoff to reduce the patient load to a manageable level. Most patients are adults.

If more dentists and staff were willing to volunteer, the clinic could theoretically expand and even treat young people, but Hulsey doesn’t think it will happen. “I’m always recruiting,” she said. “I have no support staff. It’s hard even in your own practice to hire someone who’s an experienced dental assistant.”

### Faith-based models

On the other hand, there is a precedent for a larger, faith-based operation elsewhere in Kentucky. First Baptist Church of Frankfort



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**...more than half (of Foust Elementary School’s 378 students) have never been to a dentist**

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opened the Mission: Frankfort dental clinic in their church building in September of 2002.

"We invested about \$80,000 in the clinic itself," said David Hinson, pastor of First Baptist and director of Mission: Frankfort, which also includes medical and pharmacy components. "It took a year to get it up and running."

The three-chair clinic is as operational as any dentist's office, he said. Organizers put in the chairs, pump systems, plumbing, water, even cabinets. Nashville Dental Company donated time and expertise to help them set up, Crest donated toothpaste and brushes, Kentucky State University gave surgical instruments, and many other dentists and companies also donated equipment. Monetary support came privately from church members. Since the clinic opened three years ago, the church has spent about \$31,000 on dental supplies.

The clinic developed a partnership with the Franklin County Health Department, which actually makes the appointments for the clinic. "Virtually 100 percent of the people who come to clinic are uninsured," Hinson said. "Patients we see are not patients that would come to (dentist) offices."

The clinic is open when the nine dentists and seven hygienists who volunteer are able to be there. Some dentists will come for a morning; others will take an entire day to treat patients. They've seen 121 patients who have made 217 visits to the clinic, Hinson said.

The clinic has also received sets of dentures each year from two labs, in addition to medication from a couple of pharmacies. "It has really been a loose-knit coalition," Hinson said. "The larger dental community has helped us as well."

One woman had been missing her four front teeth and often kept her hand over her mouth for 10 years. A dentist at the clinic restored her teeth and her life has been transformed, according to her sister.

Hinson has been so involved that he even went with the Kentucky Dental Association to successfully lobby the state legislature to change a law to allow dental specialists, such as orthodontists, to practice general dentistry in a free clinic setting.

Hinson also promotes a new clinic sponsored by Calvary Baptist Church in Lexington. Twenty-five local dentists and other dental professionals have signed up to rotate over three nights a week in the facility the church has set up.

"Kentucky has the number-one dental need in the United States," Hinson said. "It's one of my dreams, in every major community in Kentucky, to have a mission dental clinic. I do think the dental community is looking for ways to establish coalitions."

## Expanding clinic services

Mountjoy directs the Daviess County Community Access Project (DC-CAP), which links low-income, uninsured Daviess County residents with health care providers. He said he may be able to add a dental component eventually, but in the meantime, he's focusing on establishing the medical program with the health care community. "Once we kind of get this program more solidified or grounded, it'll be easier to roll out an expansion with dentists," he said.

He said the REACH Clinic, a complement to DC-CAP which he also directs and which provides health services for residents who are covered by Medicaid and Medicare as well as discounted services for the uninsured, has an extra exam room that would be a possible location for a small clinic. The primary obstacle is funding, he said. "To get a full-time person (a dentist) generating little to no income is difficult." Then there's the cost of equipment and assistants. "It's

definitely doable, it's just a matter of spending time and putting hard, real numbers against it," he said.

One possible funding source is grant money, specifically from Catholic Health Partners, a major player in Owensboro health care over the years. Doug Borders, who recently retired after years as an executive with the company, said the organization does sometimes approve requests similar to what Daviess County would need for a clinic. "They like the idea of helping out children," he said. "They're really interested in obviously gearing whatever funds they give to those that are in the most need. When you mention kids, it generally becomes attractive to them."

However funding for a clinic or a full-time dentist at the health department most likely would not come from a tax increase by the Daviess County Board of Health, said Lee Denham, director of the Green River District Health Department. "It would take a very significant presentation to them," he said. "They would have to see the extent of the unmet need."

Denham said that in the 1970s, the health department contracted with a dentist who did cleanings for kids covered by Medicaid, but at some point, that service ended. Because the health department serves a seven-county district, it must demonstrate how a service offered only in one county will be supported by that county, whether through taxes, fees or other funding sources, Denham said. "It's probably not feasible to offer (a clinic or a dentist) only in Daviess County if there was need in the other six counties," he said.

Rather than working with an outside clinic, Denham said the health department would prefer to let DC-CAP, which is still a new program, try to add dental care to their services. He said he is willing for the health department to participate in discussions and plans with the community. "If it's an identified public health need not otherwise being met, we have a responsibility to work with other groups to try to meet (it)," he said. "If this is something public health can help with, we'd be glad to." He said the health department has so many other issues on its plate, though, that it wouldn't be able to take the lead in a concerted effort to establish a clinic.

Other options for dental care include trying to attract new graduates from the dental schools at the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville (Kentucky is one of the few states with two dental schools). Dr. Raynor Mullins, the head of public health at UK's college of dentistry, said officials are working on a concept called a regional dental center that would insert dental clinics into existing medical centers across the state. The program would serve as a combined research and service opportunity and part of the mission, he said, would be to reach disadvantaged people. UK officials are currently developing a prototype in Hazard. "It's pretty clear we have oral health access problems across Kentucky," Mullins said. We are always willing to sit down and talk with folks who want to partner in the community to improve the health of citizens."

Mullins and Murphy also suggested mobile dental clinics that could visit schools and provide screenings and cleanings through the Medicaid program.

Whatever the final solution turns out to be, advocates are clear about one thing: there must be a solution. Too many children are hurting. ■

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**If cavities that require simple fillings aren't treated early, the teeth will rot from the inside out, requiring a root canal or an extraction. Preventive care would save huge amounts of time and money.**

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# THE State Budget

*By Rodney Berry*

The state legislature has convened, and once again the battle lines are drawn between those who have pledged not to raise taxes and who want to shrink government, and those who claim that we are under-funded and unprepared to meet increasing needs in education, health care and other vital services.

With a modest surplus projected, should legislators stay the course and postpone significant funding of key areas? Should they cut spending on existing programs and capital projects, or rely on savings from efficiencies?

If revenue needs to be raised – state agencies have proposed a total of \$2 billion in spending increases – what are the fairest and most responsible options?

## BUDGET BASICS

During the 2006 Kentucky General Assembly, legislators will consider a two-year (biennium) budget for fiscal years 2007 and 2008.

The state budget consists of two primary components: the General Fund and the Road Fund. This brief focuses on the General Fund budget, which most directly affects ongoing programs and projects funded by state government.

### General Fund

Analysts predict that the General Fund will end the 2006 fiscal year (on June 30) with a \$300 million surplus, perhaps \$350 million. These forecasts change regularly.

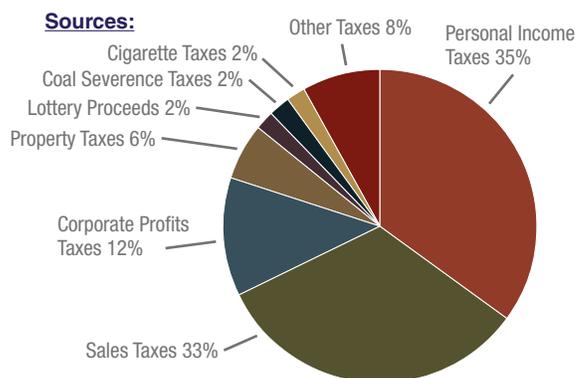
In addition, a \$124 million surplus was also carried forward from the 2005 fiscal year.

This is a considerable financial improvement over recent years. Some attribute this to an upswing in the national economy; others point to various initiatives of Gov. Ernie Fletcher.

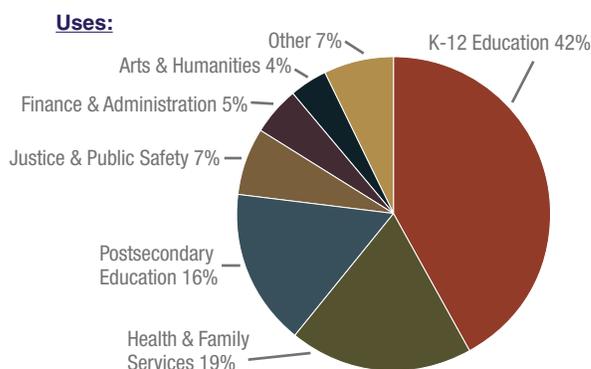
Notwithstanding the relatively calm fiscal waters ahead, analysts warn Kentucky leaders of the roaring, rocky rapids looming around the bend.

	Revenue	Expenditures
Surplus carried forward from FY 2005	\$ 124,000,000	
Projections FY 2006 (ending June 30, 2006)	8,200,000,000	7,900,000,000
Projections FY 2007	8,300,000,000	Budget to be determined
Projections FY 2008	8,600,000,000	Budget to be determined

### State Government General Fund



*Kentucky differs from most states in that personal income taxes, rather than property taxes, generate most of the revenue.*



### A Balanced Budget?

The Kentucky Constitution requires a balanced budget, but legislators have managed to operate state government with an estimated \$200 million “structural deficit” – that is, taking in about \$200 million less than is spent and borrowing funds from various state government reserves (savings which are designated for other purposes) in order to balance the budget.

Reserves that have been drawn from in recent years include:

- \$59 million from the Kentucky Higher Education Student Loan Corporation
- \$63 million from a fund dedicated to the cleanup of leaking underground petroleum storage tanks
- \$70 million from Kentucky Access High Risk (health care) Pool
- State government’s Budget Reserve Trust “Rainy Day” Fund
- Fees earmarked for various state boards and commissions

### Debt

The 2005 legislature adopted a budget containing the highest new debt burden ever authorized – \$2.2 billion in bonds for capital projects across the state. Officials also delayed the start of 20-year bond payments to reduce short-term financial pressures. (Some analysts are concerned that this could threaten Kentucky’s bond rating, increase interest rates or limit important investments in other areas.)

Kentucky state government now carries the seventh highest per capita state and local debt in the nation, and second highest relative to state revenues.

### Reserves

The Fletcher administration has dedicated the maximum allowed by law to the restoration of the Budget Reserve Trust Fund (“Rainy Day” Fund). The fund reached a high of \$278 million during the Patton administration, but was depleted during the short-falls in 2001-2003. The fund increased from \$29 million in fiscal year 2005 to \$119 million in fiscal year 2006.

## RECENT HISTORY

### 2005 General Assembly

Various circumstances, issues and trends affected the climate of the 2005 legislative session:

- pressure to adopt a budget (a budget agreement was not reached in 2004)
- severe state government financial pressures predicted by the Fox Report, an independent study commissioned by the legislature

- a “no new tax” pledge signed by Gov. Ernie Fletcher and 50 members of the legislature
- a “revenue neutral” tax modernization proposal from Fletcher
- the governor’s position that tax increases can be averted by finding efficiencies and eliminating waste, fraud and abuse in state government

# Framing the Issue: The State Budget

## Tax Modernization

Most of Gov. Fletcher's tax modernization proposal (JOBS – Jobs, Opportunities, Bi-Partisan, Solution) was adopted by the 2005 legislature.

Taxes were increased on cigarettes, alcohol package sales and satellite, telephone and cable television. Some corporate tax loopholes were closed, particularly with regard to limited liability corporations. The state corporate license tax was exchanged for an alternative minimum tax.

Tax modernization included significant cuts in corporate tax rates and personal income taxes, eliminating income taxes for individuals and families in poverty and lowering income taxes for everyone else. (Fletcher proposed a "trigger" to automatically continue income tax reductions over time, but it was removed by the legislature.)

Tax modernization is expected to produce a one year revenue increase of \$110 million in fiscal year 2006. Over five years, however, the \$707 million in new revenue it is projected to generate will be offset by \$710 million in revenue reductions.

### A great accomplishment?

Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform, certified Kentucky's tax modernization legislation as "revenue neutral" and within the approved limits of officials signing the "no new tax pledge." Gov. Fletcher said that tax modernization is "truly historic, unprecedented and astounding." Some elements of the plan – particularly the elimination of personal income taxes for the poor – are broadly endorsed.

### A missed opportunity?

Critics say that tax modernization will allow only marginal increases for education and vital services. They say that changes fell short of expanding sales tax to the growing service sector, awarded excessive tax reductions on corporate net profits, and did not establish a progressive income tax which would draw more from those most able to pay.



## Administrative Efficiencies

In response to a \$300 million projected deficit in his first fiscal year and a \$710 million deficit for the following year, Gov. Fletcher called for a 2.5 percent across-the-board reduction in spending by each cabinet. State agencies were encouraged to reduce spending even when funds had been appropriated. Fletcher claimed this resulted in nearly \$200 million in savings over two years.

At midterm, the Fletcher administration also reported that it had...

- reduced state government cabinets from 14 to 9
- reduced Transportation Cabinet spending by \$74 million through improved construction management
- canceled 2,000 state credit cards
- lowered the annual credit card limit to \$285 million
- saved millions by implementing state employee recommendations
- modernized medical prescription drug processing
- saved \$38 million per year by joining an eight-state Medicaid pool
- saved \$100,000 by eliminating a newspaper clipping service
- saved \$2 million by replacing impact printers with laser printers
- merged 40 state government marketing divisions into one
- saved \$2-\$3 million annually through improved management of state vehicles
- collected \$127 million in delinquent taxes

## Pressures

Despite tax modernization, administrative efficiencies, and overall improved economic conditions, state government faces immense financial challenges.

The Fox Report, commissioned by the state legislature, projected that state government would need to raise \$2.3 billion by 2010 to maintain existing services. This was attributed to an outdated tax system. However, the restructured tax system adopted by the 2005 legislature is revenue neutral, meaning it won't raise more money for the state.

Why is state government under such financial pressure? Analysts point to the following:

- House Bill 44, enacted in 1979, put limits on state and local property tax increases. State property tax rates decreased from 31 cents per \$100 valuation to 13 cents. (The estimated current annual revenue loss is \$300 million.)

- Since 2001, six rounds of budget cuts have reduced revenues by \$1.1 billion.
- In the 1990s, state taxes were cut 26 times.
- While some tax exemptions are warranted (such as the sales tax exemption on groceries), many reflect the influence of special interests. Tax exemptions reduce state government revenue by \$6.4 billion per year.
- Skyrocketing health care and prescription drug costs intensified by unhealthy lifestyles, an aging population and growing numbers of state government retirees.
- An exploding prison population due, in large part, to tougher drug sentencing.
- Excessive economic development incentives.
- Federal tax cuts and unfunded mandates that shifted responsibilities and costs to state government.
- Significant reduction in corporate taxes.

## NEEDS & WANTS

Some officials and analysts align progress with low taxes and a reduced government role; others point to \$1.8 billion in unmet needs due to chronic under-funding of state government. By 2010, they claim the shortfall will be \$2.3 billion.

With a modest General Fund surplus carried forward from last year and projected for the next two years, Gov. Fletcher and the legislature have received many requests from cabinet secretaries, university presidents, city and county officials, and special

project advocates. More than \$1 billion in special requests are before the 2006 General Assembly.

Despite tax modernization and efficient management, most analysts conclude that long-term projections are bleak and that future balanced budgets will require either substantial tax increases or elimination of programs and services typically embraced as a state government responsibility.

### Education

The Kentucky school reforms that were launched in the 1990s and the ambitious higher education initiatives in recent years are not without critics who challenge progress reports and question whether more money should be directed at programs that don't work. They suggest more support for private schools, extended privileges for parents to pull their children from poor-performing schools and lower construction wages to reduce the cost of new school buildings.

Education advocates stress that impressive progress has been achieved in Kentucky, but the state has lost ground and continued success is threatened by under-funding. The chairman of the Business Forum on Kentucky Education says there's no question that education is under-funded in Kentucky.

Gov. Fletcher points to a \$526 million increase in spending on P-12 education, a \$123 million increase in spending on postsecondary education and \$27 million spent for debt service on local school and campus construction projects since 2004. Education leaders and advocates say that these increases did not make up for previous cuts by the legislature since the 1990s.

#### ***Why do some people say that state government should invest more in education?***

##### **To invest in a competitive future**

Kentucky is ranked 50th in per capita support for education. Ours is the only state that spends less than \$1,000 per student. Depending on the measurement used, Kentucky spends between \$800 and \$1,400 less per student annually than other states, a difference of \$500 million to \$1 billion.

##### **To attract and retain the best teachers**

Kentucky needs skilled, qualified teachers with majors or minors in the subjects they teach (almost a third teach outside their field). Moreover, the average teacher salary in Kentucky was more than \$7,000 less than the national average in 2005, and nearly \$4,400 less than the average of surrounding states. Some analysts claim that when Kentucky's low cost-of-living is considered, teachers in our state are not underpaid.

##### **K-12 ADVOCATES REQUEST:**

Our public schools need \$337 million to bring pupil spending up to the average of surrounding states, and \$982 million to lift Kentucky into the top 10.

##### **To educate our workforce**

For the state to reach the national average of working-age adults with a bachelor's degree, Kentucky would need to double those with bachelor's degrees to 800,000. Postsecondary institutions cannot educate that number of students without substantial increases in resources.



##### **To seek excellence in higher education**

In recent years, as more Kentuckians recognize the need to complete college, state government has cut funding. Kentucky's public colleges and universities need more than \$250 million annually to catch up with funding of comparable institutions in other states. Many construction projects (including Owensboro's Advanced Technology Center) have been on hold or incomplete for years. The mandated goal of creating top-ranked research universities at the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville will be a historical footnote if ample funds are not authorized toward that end. (Kentucky is currently ranked 41st in university research and development.)

##### **CPE REQUEST:**

The Council on Postsecondary Education requested an 18 percent increase for fiscal year 2007-2008 and a capital construction program that will cost \$55 million per year for debt service.

### Troubling trends in education?

- In 2003, the Webster County Schools went to a four-day school week.
- In 2005, a Clark County High School PTO resorted to bingo to pay for textbooks.
- The Fayette County Schools cut its budget for the past three years, including \$1.6 million in 2005.
- Cuts in postsecondary education have been passed on to parents and students in tuition increases. In 2005, from a 12 percent increase at the University of Kentucky to a 23 percent increase at Eastern Kentucky University.
- Between 1999 and 2004, state funding per pupil at Kentucky Community and Technical Colleges dropped 31 percent.

## Health and Human Services

Kentucky faces daunting challenges in health care – and in human services that are exacerbated when health care is less accessible:

- ...skyrocketing costs for care and prescriptions drugs
- ...a growing number of uninsured and underinsured who seldom receive preventive care, postpone medical care when they need it and resort to hospital emergency services when conditions get serious
- ...unhealthy lifestyles characterized by smoking, inactivity, obesity, and poor nutrition
- ...a poor, aging, and largely uneducated population

**Why do some people say that state government should invest more in health and human services?**

### To improve the health of Kentuckians

Kentuckians death rate is 18 percent worse than the national average and the health of its children recently dropped to its lowest rating in 16 years. Kentucky leads the nation in lung cancer deaths and is second in deaths from all cancers. Kentucky has the highest smoking rate in the nation. More than 575,000 Kentuckians currently have no health insurance.

### To help lift people out of poverty

Kentucky's poverty rate is increasing faster than all but one state. The overall well-being of Kentucky's children is now ranked 42nd among states, the worst ranking in the 16 years. Nearly 44,000 Kentuckians experience homelessness during the year. Many poor children are reared by single mothers who will have greater difficulty obtaining child support after federal budget cuts reduce enforcement capacity.

### To sustain the only source of health care for many

Medicaid, a federal/state program, serves 15 percent of Kentucky's population: 700,000 poor, disabled, and pregnant women and 50,000 children (44 percent of births). As health care costs increase and more employers reduce or eliminate health insurance benefits, an increasing number of people will qualify for Medicaid. (The federal government contributes 70 percent of the cost of Medicaid, state government 30 percent.)

### To ensure dignity and compassion for our elderly

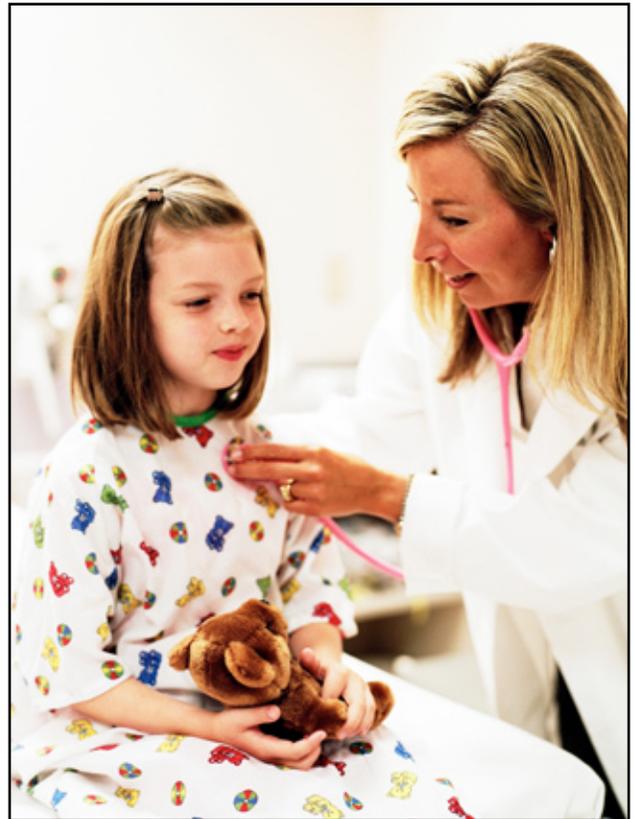
Approximately half the \$50,000 average annual cost of nursing home care is covered by Medicaid. An estimated 30,000 Kentuckians live in nursing homes. Seventy percent of Medicaid is used for long-term care. With an aging population, this need will increase dramatically in coming years.

### **MEDICAID SUPPORTERS REQUEST:**

Medicaid (Kentucky's portion) faces a \$135 million shortfall in the current fiscal year, reducing funds available for other government services such as education, state employee and teacher pensions, corrections and more. Moreover, Medicaid costs may increase by 40 percent in the next biennium.

Beyond absorbing the current shortfall, advocates for the poor promote the need to develop recurring revenue to fund Medicaid as an essential service. Meanwhile, officials recognize the need to re-examine Medicaid eligibility criteria, limits on services, fees or co-pay increases as ways to reduce the shortfall. Nonetheless, many analysts conclude that the program is not sustainable without a significant infusion of state money.

Officials and advocates point to other under-funded programs,



such as mental health, and pressures from requirements of the federal government as participant in the Medicare prescription drug benefit program. Some estimate that as much as \$110 million is needed for these programs alone.

## Highlights of Gov. Fletcher's Medicaid Plan



- Obtain a federal government waiver to give the state more administrative discretion
- Develop a case management approach with controls on prescription drugs (30,000 Kentuckians receive more than 20 prescriptions per month)
- Direct more non-emergency cases away from emergency rooms and to clinics and primary care physicians
- Promote prevention, wellness, and healthy lifestyles

## Justice and Corrections

Since 1970, Kentucky's prison population increased from 2,838 to 17,330 (600 percent). This was due in large part to stiffer drug penalties enacted by state legislators. Drug crimes have serious societal implications and warrant serious penalties, but the penalties must be weighed against the impact on the judicial and corrections system.

### ***Why do some people say that state government should invest more in justice and corrections?***

#### **To develop more effective alternatives to incarceration**

A dollar spent on prevention programs saves more than four dollars in crime costs. Rehabilitation coordinated through a drug court costs an average of \$3,000; the average cost of imprisonment is \$17,000. Drug courts saved Kentucky \$14.5 million since 1996. Existing regional treatment centers serve only 10 percent of the 260,000 Kentuckians who abuse drugs, alcohol, or prescription drugs.

#### **To relieve county governments of a responsibility most cannot handle**

County detention facilities are typically ill-equipped to absorb the volume and complexity of incarcerating and treating inmates who are incarcerated for drug-related offenses. Before officials established a county occupational tax, Daviess County was forced to absorb a deficit of approximately \$1 million per year tied to its detention facility.

#### **To ensure quality legal representation for the poor**

Despite representing more than 130,000 clients annually in criminal cases (double the recommended caseload), the Kentucky Department of Public Advocacy budget has been cut in recent years. Public defenders have fewer than four hours to spend on each case.

Six hundred thousand Kentuckians are eligible for legal aid, but because of the excessive caseload, many clients must be turned away. For indigent defense, Kentucky spends \$7.31 per capita, 27 percent less than the national average.



#### **JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONS ADVOCATES REQUEST:**

Officials say that drug treatment alone should be increased at least \$15-20 million per year. To move Kentucky to an average status state (25th from 44th) in terms of state mental health and substance abuse funding, \$25 million per year for 10 years would be needed.

An estimated \$100 million per year is needed to prevent county jails from facing deficits when housing state prisoners. Ten million dollars is needed to fully fund an adequate public defender system, and legal aid programs need upwards of \$3 million.

## Economic Development

Championed by state and community leaders, economic development projects include workforce development and skills assessment programs for employers, capital projects, infrastructure, industrial parks, incentives for business recruitment or expansion, job training, and much more.

Some analysts claim that 80 percent of the \$800 million Kentucky spent on economic development in 2004 was used for short-sighted financial incentives to entice businesses to Kentucky. They claim that funds would have been better spent on education, small business development, infrastructure or technology.

### ***Why do some people say that state government should invest more in economic development?***

#### **To bring jobs and opportunity to Kentucky**

Kentucky is the fifth poorest state in the U.S. We have the sixth

lowest per capita income and our average weekly wages are the slowest growing in the nation.

#### **To help Kentucky "grow its own"**

Some analysts promote a strategy of business expansion and entrepreneurialism through business incubators, technology pilot projects and university partnerships, venture capital, job retraining, and more.

#### **To bring distinction, marketability, and an improved quality of life to Kentucky**

Arenas that could attract an NBA franchise, facilities to attract the premier equestrian event in the world, riverfronts that attract spin-off development and enhance a community's image...some make a case that state government should have a lead role in such initiatives that generally require local, federal and private funds as well.

## State Employee/Teacher Retirement Funds

The state employee-teacher retirement program is under-funded by \$4.36 billion, more than twice the average state payroll. With an average age of 42, the number of eligible employees will peak at 51,000 in three years. Without proper planning or adequate funding, this obligation could dilute resources available for other vital state government services.

The cost of health care and insurance premiums is a driving factor in this major expense. Health insurance currently costs \$132 million for teachers and state employees.

***Why do some people say that state government should spend more toward state employee-teacher retirement?***

### **To fulfill our obligations**

Unlike a corporation that can file bankruptcy and abandon its retirees, state government is obligated to provide retirement benefits for its former employees, which includes public school teachers.

### **RETIREMENT SYSTEM REQUEST:**

The executive director of the state employee retirement system urges the 2006 legislature to authorize \$350 million for the system.



## Why is the state budget important to Owensboro-Daviess County?

*In Fiscal Year 2003, our community received from state government...*

**\$146.6 million in projects and services, including:**

- \$63.4 million for K-12 education
- \$17.2 million for Medicaid and K-Chip benefits and administration
- \$8.2 million for transportation construction and maintenance
- \$6.7 million for Owensboro Community and Technical College
- \$3.1 million for our courts
- \$3.0 million for family and community services
- \$2.4 million for juvenile justice
- \$2.0 million for teacher retirement
- \$2.0 million for mental health/mental retardation services
- \$1.9 million for KEES scholarships
- \$1.6 million in administrative services/PVA allowance
- \$1.6 million for our jail
- \$1.4 million for temporary assistance for needy families
- \$1.3 million for public health
- \$1.3 for family resource and youth services centers

...plus allocations in dozens of additional categories.

*Source:  
Paul A. Coomes, Ph.D.; Professor of Economics;  
National City Research Fellow; University of Kentucky*

# Framing the Issue: The State Budget

**The total needs and wants for the 2006 legislature as set forth by officials and analysts in education, health and human services, justice and corrections, economic development and the state employee-teacher retirement system: more than \$2 billion.**

Some respond that requests are inflated by officials who recognize that it is unusual, even in good times, for agencies and projects to receive the full amount requested.

How should Kentucky respond to these needs, these requests?

Within the context of a “revenue neutral” budget framework and a “no new taxes” climate, what can be done?

Should officials reduce government services and shift funds to priority areas?

Does state government have a spending and inefficiency problem or a revenue problem?

How should legislators balance the budget? We examine the following options:

1. Cut the bureaucracy
2. Increase taxes
3. Eliminate exemptions and loopholes
4. Allow more gaming

## Option 1: Cut the bureaucracy

Surplus funds available at the end of the current fiscal year would nearly cover the Medicaid shortfall, but there are other priority needs and Gov. Fletcher is committed to rebuilding the Budget Reserve Trust (“Rainy Day”) Fund.

Consequently, this option calls for further reductions in state government. Agency budgets would be trimmed with across-the-board reductions. There would be a continued emphasis on eliminating waste, fraud and abuse. The fundamental role of government would be re-examined and the bureaucracy dismantled when warranted.

### THOSE WHO SUPPORT THIS OPTION MAY SAY...

- State government is too large and inefficient, and there are far too many unnecessary and repetitive state programs.
- The Fletcher administration inherited a deficit, but still managed to end its first year with a surplus by making painful cuts, reducing the number of cabinets, and saving millions of dollars through more efficient management.
- Less government means less regulation and less taxation – all of which is attractive to business, investment, and job creation.
- When government is downsized, taxpayers keep more of their money to spend, save, invest and recycle into the economy.

### THOSE WHO OPPOSE THIS OPTION MAY SAY...

- Kentucky is *not* an overtaxed state (38th in total tax burden) and cannot cut its way to progress.
- Kentucky’s educational rankings have dropped on a parallel track as a billion dollars has been cut from the budget since 2001.
- The needs are obvious, if not overwhelming. If we want to set standards of excellence and compassion – in education, health care, human services, and a futuristic economy – we must make the necessary investments. You get what you pay for.
- Smart investments (e.g., early childhood development, drug prevention/treatment) will save money for state government in the long term.

## Option 2: Increase taxes

This option calls for taxes to replenish at least some of the revenue base that has been depleted from the 26 tax cuts implemented since the 1990’s. Proponents point to several apparent opportunities: cigarette tax increase, corporate tax adjustments and

closing of loopholes, sales tax on services, a progressive income tax, increase in coal severance tax, preservation of the state estate tax and others.

### THOSE WHO SUPPORT THIS OPTION MAY SAY...

- In 2005, the cigarette tax was increased from three cents to 30 cents per pack, but Kentucky’s tax is still the fifth lowest in the nation. To bring it to the national average, another 62 cents would need to be added to the tax. This would generate \$279 million annually and potentially reduce youth smoking and health care costs.
- The 2005 tax modernization package did not expand the sales tax to services (such as advertising, attorney’s fees, etc.), the economy’s fastest growing sector, nor did it establish a progressive income tax by increasing the rate paid by Kentucky’s wealthiest citizens.
- Corporate net profits taxes were lowered by 27 percent last year and many loopholes remain. In 1990, corporate taxes produced twice as much as a percentage of the state budget.
- Taxes are investments in the future, the fuel for education which is the engine for economic growth.
- Taxes are a factor, but businesses – particularly those that pay well – are attracted to communities with exceptional schools and a high quality of life.

### THOSE WHO OPPOSE THIS OPTION MAY SAY...

- Low taxes stimulate growth. Why do 80 percent of the discharged soldiers from Ft. Campbell choose Tennessee over Kentucky for their home? It’s obvious: low taxes. Tennessee has no income tax.
- Kentucky is a low-income, high-tax state that needs a stronger business climate.
- Corporations don’t pay taxes; people do. Corporate taxes are passed along in higher prices.
- In fiscal year 2006, without raising taxes, the Fletcher administration increased funds for P-12 education, debt service for new school construction, postsecondary education and Medicaid.
- Increased cigarette taxes have a detrimental effect on retail sales to out-of-state customers along Kentucky borders.

## Option 3: Eliminate exemptions and loopholes

The Kentucky tax code, which generates \$8.1 billion for the General Fund annually, exempts many individuals and groups that otherwise would bring in \$6.4 billion.

Many of these exemptions are popular and considered appropriate – for example, the sales tax exemption on groceries.

Other exemptions are unpopular. There are nearly 70 exemptions to the sales tax. Other exemptions, such as economic development incentives, are considered excessive by some analysts. Some project that closing corporate loopholes alone would raise \$300 million per year.

THOSE WHO SUPPORT THIS OPTION MAY SAY...	THOSE WHO OPPOSE THIS OPTION MAY SAY...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Special interest groups and influential lobbyists have been behind the passage of most of the exemptions and loopholes.</li> <li>■ What is good for certain industries and professional groups is not always fair or in the best interest of the public.</li> <li>■ An objective, non-partisan review of exemptions is needed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The legislature needs to have flexibility in adjusting the tax code to respond to constituent needs and requests.</li> <li>■ Exemptions are considered after cost-benefit analysis and thorough debate at the committee level and the floor of the legislature.</li> <li>■ Exemptions can be valuable tools to stimulate the economy, create jobs, and lighten the financial burden on the poor.</li> </ul>

## Option 4: Allow more gaming

Once again, the General Assembly is considering legislation to place casino gambling on the ballot for a voter referendum. The horse track industry anchors the effort and seeks to be awarded exclusive sites, but some communities – such as Owensboro – are fighting hard to be eligible as well.

Gov. Fletcher does not personally support expanded gambling, but says he will not stand in the way of the legislature. Some legislators think the governor’s leadership is essential for passage.

THOSE WHO SUPPORT THIS OPTION MAY SAY...	THOSE WHO OPPOSE THIS OPTION MAY SAY...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Kentuckians already spend more than \$1 billion on gambling trips every year outside the state. Kentucky can no longer continue to lose revenue to Indiana and Illinois, where casinos are legal. In 2002, Indiana casinos generated \$2.1 billion in sales, 16,500 jobs and \$545 million in taxes.</li> <li>■ Casinos at Kentucky’s eight horse tracks will attract 14 million people. This will strengthen Kentucky’s signature industry that employs 53,000 people and makes a \$3.4 billion annual economic impact. Last year, race tracks offered \$400 million annually to state government for casino licenses.</li> <li>■ Opposition on moral grounds is weak: Kentuckians already gamble at race tracks, at bingo halls, and with lottery tickets.</li> <li>■ The public should have a right to vote on this issue; place the issue on the ballot.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Studies indicate that while gaming may generate an infusion of funds in the short term, it hinders long-term growth because it takes money out of the economy.</li> <li>■ With the new French Lick casino, there will be 11 casinos in Indiana. The market is saturated. Casino taxes could not be used for ongoing programs because the revenues will not be sustainable.</li> <li>■ Over a three year period, more than 1.5 million new pathological gamblers have been created in the U. S. with a social cost of \$40 billion. Counties with casino gambling have an 18 percent increase in bankruptcy filings.</li> <li>■ As with the lottery, gambling inevitably attracts a greater percentage of low-income people.</li> </ul>

### Is Kentucky Business-Friendly?

- NO.**
- The Tax Foundation found that Kentucky’s business-tax burden was worse than all but six states. (Bluegrass Institute, February 15, 2005)
  - Businesses pay 44.3 percent of all taxes in Kentucky, 10 percent higher than the national average. (University of Kentucky Martin School of Public Policy)
- YES.**
- In 2005, Kentucky was ranked 9th in the nation for its business climate (*Site Selection Magazine’s Annual Competitiveness Award*) and 3rd in the nation for its workforce training programs (*Expansion Magazine*).
  - Kentucky has the lowest overall cost of doing business in the eastern U. S. (Economy.com and *North American Business Cost Review*)

### The “No New Tax” Pledge

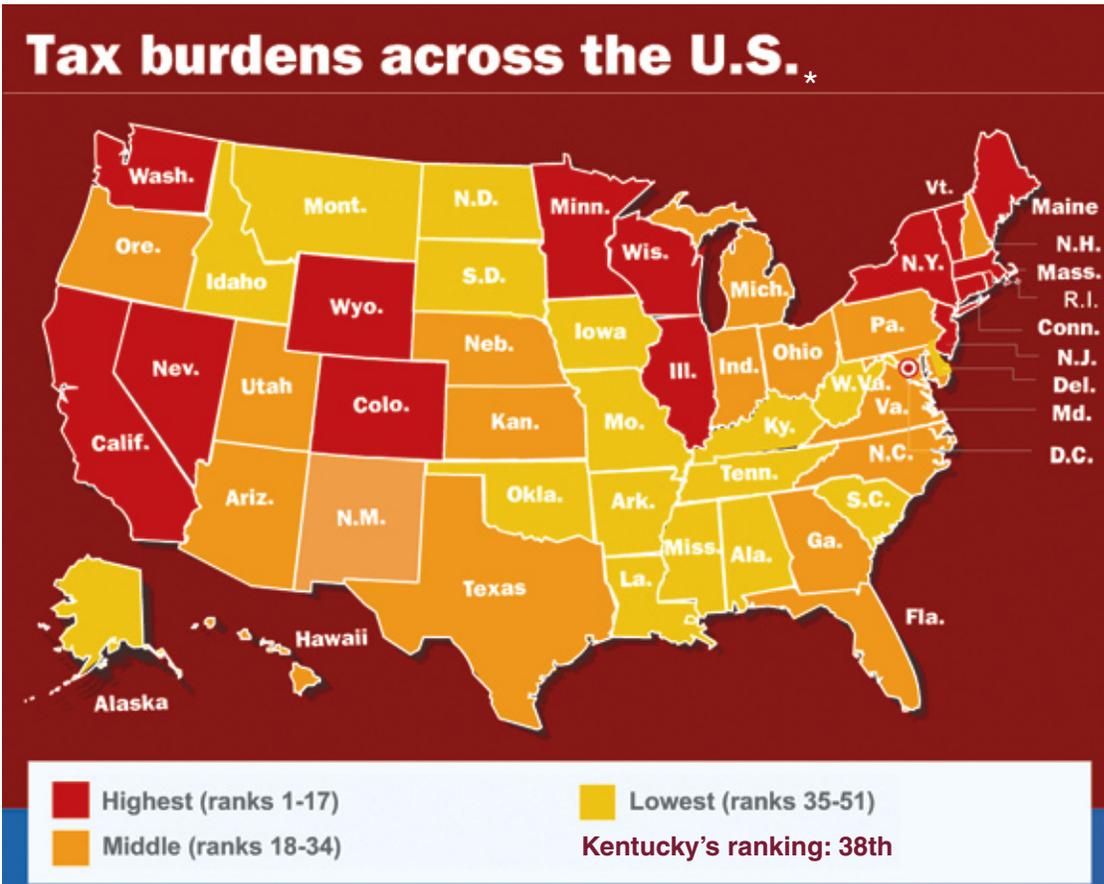
**Support:** “Anybody who says signing the pledge is irresponsible is just being silly. Not wanting to raise taxes is an honorable goal.”

Grover Norquist, president  
Americans for Tax Reform

**Opposition:** “I’ve tried to point out to (legislators) that signing the pledge would be a very bad mistake. It’s a lifetime pledge. That’s just ridiculous.”

Rep. John Draud  
R-Edgewood

## Is Kentucky over-taxed?



\* Total tax burden (local, state & federal) as a percentage of income  
Source: *The Tax Foundation* (<http://moneycentral.msn.com/content/common/flash/p111507.asp>)

### FOR MORE INFORMATION/ GET INVOLVED

**Americans for Tax Reform**  
[www.atr.org/](http://www.atr.org/)

**Bluegrass Institute**  
[www.bipps.org/](http://www.bipps.org/)

**Catholic Conference of Kentucky**  
[www.cckky.org/](http://www.cckky.org/)

**Kentucky Chamber of Commerce**  
[www.kychamber.com/](http://www.kychamber.com/)

**Kentucky Economic Justice Alliance**  
[www.keja.org/](http://www.keja.org/)

**Office of the Governor**  
<http://governor.ky.gov/>

**Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence**  
[www.prichardcommittee.org/](http://www.prichardcommittee.org/)

### SHARE YOUR VIEWS

**Gov. Ernie Fletcher**  
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Email: <http://governor.ky.gov/contact.htm>

**David Williams, Senate President**  
Phone: (270) 864-5636  
Email: <http://lrc.ky.gov/Mailform/S016.htm>

**Jody Richards, Speaker of the House**  
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**Representative Tommy Thompson**  
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Email: [tommy@thompsonhomesinc.com](mailto:tommy@thompsonhomesinc.com)

## Can state government provide needed services without new revenue?

### Yes

“We don’t need additional taxes. I think we need to learn to live within our budget.”  
– Gov. Ernie Fletcher

“(The revenue-neutral tax modernization legislation) is truly historic, unprecedented and astounding.” – Gov. Ernie Fletcher

“P-12 Education received an increase of \$526 million, including \$9 million in debt service for new local school construction. Postsecondary education was increased by \$123 million, including \$18 million for debt service for campus construction projects.”  
– Midterm Report  
Office of the Governor

“In Fiscal Year 2005, a combination of improved revenue collections and a focus on realizing efficiency savings resulted in a \$214 million budget surplus.”  
– Midterm Report  
Office of the Governor

“...lowering the (state) income tax rate is the single most important thing we can do to increase opportunity.”  
– Gov. Ernie Fletcher

“A pledge is a pledge, and a promise is still something your father would warm your behind for if you break it.”  
(A reference to the “no new tax” pledge taken by many state legislators.)  
– Chris Derry, president  
The Bluegrass Institute

“The road to higher (state government) revenues can no longer be paved with new tax dollars...Higher taxes hurt Kentucky’s already fragile economy by discouraging investment and job creation... (We need to consider) spending cuts to the massively repetitive and unnecessary state programs already in place.”  
– Bluegrass Institute

### No

“Kentucky will continue to deteriorate as long as a “revenue neutral” climate dominates the Kentucky legislature, steering Kentucky in the wrong direction.”  
– Kentucky Economic Justice Alliance

“The dominant politics of our time and the threadbare promise of progress through low taxes and minimal public investments ...is like a hurricane churning slowly offshore. When the budget storm makes landfall in Kentucky, the casualties and costs will be severe.”  
– Kentucky Economic Justice Alliance

“...generating more tax revenue will require real courage, not only from a ... governor who already believes taxes are toxic, but also from a legislature that loves to play games with campus budgets.”  
– Louisville *Courier-Journal* editorial  
Nov. 21, 2005

“Either we mount an aggressive effort to build on our accomplishments (in education) or we relegate our state to continued mediocrity.”  
– Mark Chellgren  
Associated Press  
Sept. 12, 2005

“You can’t do this (sustain a high quality educational system) with corn flakes.”  
– Humana Co-Founder David Jones

“It is not morally acceptable to have 118,000 children in Kentucky without health care.”  
– Ed Monahan  
Catholic Conference of Kentucky

“Budgets are moral documents, because they reflect our priorities.”  
– Interfaith Alliance  
National Council of Churches

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# Being gay in Owensboro

“Gay or lesbian people living here have to come to a great compromise with their own personalities. They must project a false persona with all people at all times. It’s a mixture of denial, of self-protection, and it is absolutely necessary for them to do this. It takes a tremendous toll on their spirits,” says Rev. Michael Erwin of New Hope United Church of Christ.

*By Charly Wood*

It shouldn’t be a surprise to anyone that Owensboro has its “gaylesbitran” complement of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals. Yet one local heterosexual recently told his friend Adam, “I don’t even know any gays.”

Adam is gay.

This is the paradox in which gay men and women find themselves. Some remain in the closet because they fear negative consequences if they tell family, friends and employers about their sexual orientation – while some heterosexuals appear almost willfully ignorant of the possibility that people with whom they live and work may be homosexual.

But this is changing, in Owensboro and throughout the country. Many gay men and women are coming out, demanding fairness and equal rights in all areas. There is, in short, a gay civil rights movement.

This movement is more visible in large cities than in smaller communities such as Owensboro, where gay men and women tend to take a more conservative approach to gaining acceptance. In interviews with several gay people for this story, most asked that we not print their names because they are not comfortable discussing their sexual orientation publicly.

Luther, 36, said that in Owensboro, a gay man can be “out” to his family and to his friends, but still feel the need to keep a low profile in the workplace and the larger community.

“If friends and coworkers know I am homosexual, they will think me very different from them and for the most part will reject me,” said another gay man, Adam, 40.

At the same time, Adam, Luther and others who were interviewed said they believe that they can never gain acceptance as long as people can pretend they do not exist. The hidden status that protected gays in the past, they argued, also allows no progress toward equality and fairness.

“A lot of the time, people have preconceived notions of gay people and because of that, they are afraid of gays,” Adam said. “We need to get people to realize that just because we’re gay doesn’t mean we are different than them. We want the same things, the same jobs, the same families. It’s just that we are attracted to someone of the same sex.”

“I am hoping that here in Owensboro, starting small, through education, we can get people to realize that we are the same.”

Some such efforts are already under way in Daviess County through the work of the Kentucky Fairness Alliance and religious leaders such as the Rev. Michael Erwin of the New Hope United Church of Christ. New Hope welcomes gay members and supports gay civil rights.

At the same time, there are varying degrees of opposition to homosexuality in parts of the community. County voters last

year supported a state constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage by a greater margin than the state average. One church, Trinity Baptist, openly condemns homosexuality and some of its members have protested at public gatherings with a bullhorn and signs saying “Fags Burn in Hell” and “No Civil Rights for Sodomites.”

On the other hand, that kind of approach is relatively rare. So, apparently, is violence, at least in recent years. Owensboro Police Public Information Officer Jeff Arntz said there have been no rulings of hate crimes in the city since the state passed a law in 2001 giving judges the power to sentence an offender more harshly if the judge finds a hate crime was committed. The law applies to crimes committed because of race, color, religion, sexual orientation or national origin.

Still, Owensboro may have a way to go before gay men and women feel they can prosper here. It is Erwin’s view that “The demand for orthodoxy of Owensboro is so oppressive that from the moment young persons realize they are gay -- continuing for their whole lives -- they live, no matter their economic or social status, in a situation akin to poverty. It’s a social poverty and it is so oppressive that it affects their spiritual and physical health and gay and lesbian people come to our church with very unhealthy patterns of living. I’m talking about the way they relate to everybody and everything. Gay or lesbian people living here have to come to a great compromise with their own personalities. They must project a false persona with all people at all times. It’s a mixture of denial, of self-protection, and it is absolutely necessary for them to do this. It takes a tremendous toll on their spirits.”

## A view of the past

So what has gay life in Owensboro been in the past? At a recent monthly potluck dinner for gays and lesbians, people described some of their past experiences. Notably, the worst happened 20 or 30 years ago.

“The red-neck guys really bothered you -- fired guns at you, and once even got out frog-giggers,” said Alfred, 38. Everyone at the table laughed nervously. “I’m not sure what they were going to do with the frog-giggers, but . . . .”

“Calvin (who is gay) got his arm broken by a straight kid who is now a police officer,” Donny, 42, threw in. A chorus of, “That’s scary,” ran around the table. Boyd, in his late 30s, says, “I don’t remember the cops ever bothering us that bad.”

Adam added, “In the last 20 years or so I have not heard of anything major going on in Owensboro. I’ve been called a few names, but nothing physical ever happened to me.”

Gays did not always take abuse without fighting back.

“There was a place in English Park that had a brick sidewalk,” Boyd said. “A lot of bricks wound up missing because gays threw them through windshields of straights who harassed them.”

And, he went on, “Twenty or thirty years ago it was nothing for people to go to town, jump out of cars, beat up on ‘sissies,’ get in their cars and drive away. You called the cops, their response was, ‘Well, go home.’ I’ve been there. I know. I’ve helped pick up the damned bodies!”

But “things are a lot better now,” he added. “It’s a combination of police themselves having a better attitude and of them being reined-in some from their superiors.”

That’s not to say that gay men and lesbians don’t have reason to be fearful at times. While physical abuse is a bigger concern for gay men than women, Angel, in her late 40s, said women are more likely to experience verbal abuse. “Mannish-looking lesbians, like me, get a lot more negative reactions from men than the lesbians who look more traditionally feminine do,” she said.

“I was in Books-A-Million once looking at a book while standing near the café tables,” she said. “Two guys were having coffee and one of them looked at me and said loudly, ‘That’s disgusting!’ I guess it must have been just the way I look, because I wasn’t doing anything but reading a book.”

### A view of today

What, then, is gay life in Owensboro like right now, according to gay men and women?

Luther said the greater visibility of gays and lesbians on television has caused straights to be a little more accepting, which allows gays to be more open. Angel agreed, but laughed as she said, “There’s a little bit of a downside in that people now recognize gays easier and this gives prejudiced straight men more opportunity to be at least verbally abusive.”

Also today, the Internet is a new meeting place for gays, replacing hangouts such as the local Little Hurricane Deck, painted lavender and nicknamed “the queer pier,” said Steve. Lesbians meet over the Internet too, Angel said, but even more helpful is the support they can find in Internet chat rooms. “There is even a listing of ‘Gay-Care’ centers for lesbians and children,” she said.

Still, what’s most important is whether this general acceptance is reflected in their own circles of family and friends, they said.

The first crucial decision for gays, today as always, is whether or not to tell their parents about their sexual orientation. Steve is 23 and only recently came out to his mother and father.

“My parents do know that I’m gay. I told them about two months ago. They were very loving and accepting and understanding of what I went through, which was a long depression. I had grown up in a religious household where it was wrong to be gay, and through the church I had always heard that being gay was wrong, that you would go to hell. I knew going through puberty and adolescence that I was homosexual, but I also knew I never chose to be gay. It took me a long time to come to terms with that. When I finally told my parents, it was like a burden had been lifted off my shoulders. It was just unbelievable. My life has changed completely since then. It’s just so much better.”

Nevertheless, not all young gays find such parental acceptance. Bart, 24, said, “I just told my parents a couple of weeks ago. My dad was okay with it, but my mom ‘beat me with the Bible.’” Matt, also in his 20s, came out to his parents and feels

they are struggling with accepting or rejecting his sexuality. “I told them, ‘You have two choices,’ he said. ‘You can accept me or disown me, but you don’t have to decide right now. Think about it for a while.’”

Some gays struggle for years with how to relate to their parents once they’ve told them about their sexual orientation. Lily, a lesbian who is now in her 40s, says she was in effect disowned by her parents when she came out years ago. “Even now they say I am welcome in their home as long as I don’t ‘act gay.’ I don’t even know what that means, so I don’t go to visit.”

Said Adam, “I tried to tell my dad and he would not let me tell him, literally. He knew what I was going to say and he didn’t want to hear the words come out of my mouth. I told my mom and she started crying.”

Luther has never told his parents, but said, “I know my mom knows I am gay.” The issue is never openly confronted, he said. His sister recently did a family tree. “I wanted to tell the family then but was too scared to. I just went into my room and stayed there until everybody left.”

Not long ago, Owensboro had a fledgling chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) led by Richard and Pat Blanton. Richard Blanton said he and his wife gave up the struggle after about three years because they received no solid support from parents (they have since moved to Illinois to be closer to family).

“There were 20 or 25 young gays or lesbians in contact with us and hopefully we were of some help to them,” he said. Erwin, the New Hope minister, said that Richard Blanton used to joke, “I sure have a lot of children. I’m the only parent of a gay person in Owensboro.”

Still, said Steve, many more homosexuals are opting for openness with their families than in the past – and overall, families are more accepting.

“I even know people who are 16, 17, or 18 telling their parents now,” he said. “That’s how much it has changed in just the past five, six or seven years. It’s so much better.”

### Challenges in the workplace

Coming out in the workplace is challenging in a different way because it could affect a gay person’s livelihood, gay men and women said. There are no laws in Kentucky either mandating or denying equal rights for gays in the workplace. Former Gov. Paul Patton did issue an executive order mandating fairness in state government job hiring. But the climate of the workplace can be a different story.

“At work some people won’t eat the food I bring to potluck,” said Lily, a state employee. She described one experience when she nervously licked her lips while asking for some papers from a coworker whom she knew to be hostile to gays. The worker complained to their supervisor that Lily had sexually harassed her. “This same worker once deliberately parked her car with its bumper touching the bumper of my car, got out and slammed the door so hard that the force shook my car,” Lily said. Lily said she protested to the worker but then got in trouble with her supervisor for not going through the proper channels. Lily said she had previously complained to the supervisor about similar past incidents and nothing had ever been done.

On the other hand, said Adam, “There is a lot of bigotry and hatred here, but there’s also silent support -- a lot of people, even straight employers, who support us but won’t publicly admit they do.”

Luther said three or four gays work where he works: “The

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**...not all young gays find such parental acceptance. Bart, 24, said, I just told my parents a couple of weeks ago. My dad was okay with it, but my mom beat me with the Bible.**

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## Being gay in Owensboro

general policy is, 'Don't ask, don't tell,'" Ricky, in his mid-20s, said, "My boss says the customers don't need to know that a worker is gay."

Because of their fear of jeopardizing their jobs, some gay men and women said they are reluctant to participate openly in political efforts on behalf of gay rights. The Kentucky Fairness Alliance, a statewide gay-rights group, is beginning to make inroads throughout the state. It led the "No on the Amendment" campaign in 2004 to oppose a proposed state constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriages. Adam said he was active in the "No" campaign, but "I did not go door-to-door because of my job."

### Some welcoming churches

Some gays said they have felt so unwelcome in their churches that they simply stopped attending. However some congregations in Owensboro welcome gays. Erwin's New Hope United Church of Christ is listed in a website -- [www.gaychurches.org](http://www.gaychurches.org) -- in a city-by-city listing of "Welcoming Gay Friendly Churches in Kentucky." His congregation is the only one of any denomination on that list from Owensboro. Even though it's not on the list, the Unitarian Universalist Association, which has had a congregation in Owensboro since 1987, has been on record as welcoming gays since 1970, and in 1994 voted in favor of the legalization of same-sex marriages. Said Pastoral Associate Claudia Ramisch of Owensboro, "The issue of us welcoming gays has been so long-established that it simply never comes up."

Some other denominations, such as Southern Baptists, are on record as opposing homosexuality. The lines are not so clearly drawn in other congregations. Father Pat Connell of Trinity Episcopal Church in Owensboro acknowledged that homosexuality is an issue in his church. There are gay couples who are a part of the congregation and who are very open about their sexuality, he said. "I don't know how many gays we have because I don't ask anyone their sexual orientation," he said. "We acknowledge that there are people in the church who do not approve of homosexuality, and feel that homosexuality is morally bad. There is a 2,000-year history in Christianity that mostly has been negative on homosexuality. But there are also contemporary sociological and psychological issues to be dealt with. We are in a faith position and we do not say to people, 'You are wrong.' We ask ourselves how we are to work together on such divisive issues." At the same time, "No persons are going to be excluded from the congregation because they are gay," he said.

### A changing political climate?

While the "No" campaign failed -- and the amendment passed -- the Kentucky Fairness Alliance has redoubled its efforts to add members and advocate on behalf of gay rights, in Owensboro and statewide.

The alliance was organized in 1993 to fight proposed sodomy laws in the state. It "seeks to advance equality for lesbian,

gay, bisexual and transgender people through leadership development, public education and by encouraging participation in the democratic process," its mission says.

Its primary focus has been in opposing proposed anti-gay bills in local communities and the Kentucky legislature, and it has helped defeat more than 50, losing on two. One of them was the constitutional amendment. Seventy-five percent of Kentuckians voted in favor of the amendment, 25 percent against.

But gay-rights activists in Owensboro were more optimistic about the results, because the campaign helped organize Owensboro citizens to support gay rights for the first time. "I definitely think we changed some minds," said Linda Powe, who participated in the local "No" campaign.

The alliance asked Erwin, a straight, white minister, to lead the local "No" campaign in 2004. Erwin said that he and his colleagues followed a "two wins" strategy. Besides winning the election, they hoped to empower the gay and lesbian community and put that energy back into the alliance after the campaign.

The key component of the second strategy was personal conversations with the voters on their front doorsteps, and it worked, he said. Statewide the amendment passed with 75 percent of the vote but in Daviess County with 80 percent. However, in the precincts where the "No" campaign canvassed door-to-door, the local vote against the amendment was at least 25 percent and in some precincts as high as 40 percent, Erwin said.

It remains to be seen whether this effort to build support for gay civil rights in Owensboro will carry over into future elections or issues. Only three people attended a recent forum here that was organized by the fairness alliance. At the same time, the alliance's communications director, Misty York of Bowling Green, said the organization has grown statewide from 800 members in 2004 to 8,000 today, and energizes supporters primarily through email.

Currently, the alliance's primary emphasis is on lobbying state legislators in their local district offices. York said that too often, when lawmakers are lobbied at the Capitol in Frankfort, they say, "Well, my constituents are opposed to that kind of thing." That's why it's so important for them to hear from supporters of gay civil rights in their hometowns, she said.

Powe, who has been involved in other equal-rights issues, said she thinks the fight against the amendment will make a difference in the long term. "I think there is maybe beginning to be a backlash against the moral absolutism of the Christian right," she said. "I think that people are beginning to wake up."

Lily is especially optimistic. She has two daughters, one still in school, and Lily finds most of the young people far more open than their parents. She tells of the daughter of the woman at work who seemed so hostile to her. The girl made it a point to hug Lily, to let her mother know she disagreed. ■

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**Mannish-looking lesbians, like me, get a lot more negative reactions from men than the lesbians who look more traditionally feminine... I was in Books-A-Million once looking at a book while standing near the café tables... Two guys were having coffee and one of them looked at me and said loudly, That's disgusting! I guess it must have been just the way I look, because I wasn't doing anything but reading a book.**

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# Citizens Speak... LEADERS RESPOND

## Leib report documents citizen support of baseball stadium

The first phase of a \$78,000 feasibility study for a new arena and minor league baseball stadium was released by the Leib Group on Nov. 21, 2005. The first phase addressed the market support; the second phase that will examine the financial feasibility was to be released in January but was postponed. The study was commissioned by the City of Owensboro and the Daviess County Fiscal Court. (The Bring Back Baseball Committee contributed \$10,000 – approximately half the cost to expand the scope of an arena study to include the baseball stadium.)

### Survey results

A majority of area citizens (60 percent) are interested in minor league baseball in Owensboro. More than a third have a “definite interest.” Attendance projections were also in line with other Frontier League teams and comparable markets.

Citizens also expressed a “very solid response” for concerts: 77 percent “interest” and 44 percent “definite interest.” (The stadium is promoted as a venue for concerts, festivals, and exhibitions, in addition to baseball.)

Survey respondents also had a “strong interest” in baseball season tickets (29 percent), premium seating (19 percent), facility/event sponsorship (16 percent), baseball team sponsorship (11 percent) and facility use for business (20 percent).

The random sample automated survey was conducted on Oct. 25th and 27th and 418 individuals responded. The survey included counties within a one-hour drive from downtown Owensboro.

The market support for a new downtown arena was not as favorable. An arena was examined as a potential home of a minor league hockey franchise, minor league (arena) football franchise, concerts and convention uses.

### Conclusions and recommendations

The report includes the following conclusions and recommendations:

“The Owensboro market is in the lower half of the selected comparable and Frontier League markets in terms of both population size and economic strength. However, these differences are not

significant enough to preclude the successful operation of an independent league baseball franchise in the market, provided a new stadium is constructed and competent, experienced management is secured for the franchise. The success of other comparable and Frontier League markets is evidence of this.” (Proponents have targeted the Frontier League for the franchise affiliation.)

“A solid, wide-reaching marketing plan combined with excellent customer service and amenities at the ballpark will allow a professional baseball team to thrive.”

“The stadium should be constructed as a multi-purpose facility with the ability to accommodate concerts and festivals, as there is strong interest in, and need for space, for these events as well.”

“A new facility with approximately 3,000 permanent seats that hosts Frontier League baseball, concerts, festivals and other community events would be expected to be supported by the market, in terms of generating an adequate number of events and attendees.”

\* \* \*

Once city and county officials have an opportunity to digest the report, they will reconsider the proposal from the Bring Back Baseball Committee. The committee proposed that local government provide a low-cost land lease and infrastructure for the stadium. The stadium would be owned and developed by a nonprofit corporation and financed with tax free bonds, local lenders and a surcharge on all revenues. A Frontier League franchise would also be owned by the nonprofit corporation. The corporation would be governed by a local board of directors.

*Note: Rodney Berry, editor of the Public Life Advocate, serves on the Bring Back Baseball Committee.*





# JANUARY/FEBRUARY Public AGENDA

Meetings, hearings, and forums open to the public. Please contact us if your organization would like its events listed by calling 685-2652 or sending an email to [info@pfo.org](mailto:info@pfo.org). (Meetings are subject to change.)

## The TRACKER DATA OF INTEREST



Compiled by  
Chad M. Gesser

### Important Upcoming Public Meetings

#### JANUARY

- 9 Government Unification Task Force**  
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.  
Green River Area Development District
- 12 Citizens Health Care Advocates**  
5:30 p.m.  
Program: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Influenza  
Panelists: Niv Seerpi, epidemiologist, Green River District Health Department; Angela Woosley, RN, community preparedness planner; Lisa Hopper, bioterrorism program specialist  
Green River District Health Department  
Bedford Walker Community Room
- 13 Owensboro-Daviess County Asset Building Coalition**  
10:30 a.m.  
Press Conference  
Owensboro Community and Technical College  
4800 New Hartford Road
- 18 Daviess County Fiscal Court**  
1:30 p.m.  
Work session: Digital Communications, Inc. and Spectrum Technologies to attend to discuss the court's Broadband Initiative  
Daviess County Courtroom
- 23 Government Unification Task Force**  
5:30 p.m.  
Location: TBD
- 24 Community Forum – State Budget**  
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.  
Green River Area Development District
- 26 Owensboro Area World Affairs Council (OAWAC)**

7:00 p.m.  
Guest Speaker: John Stempel, Senior Professor of International Relations, University of Kentucky Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce  
Owensboro Community and Technical College  
Blandford Auditorium

#### FEBRUARY

- 2 Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce**  
Rooster Booster Breakfast  
7:30 a.m.  
Guest speaker: Gov. Ernie Fletcher  
Executive Inn  
International Room A
- 6 Government Unification Task Force**  
6:30-8:30 p.m.  
Green River Area Development District
- 9 Citizens Health Care Advocates**  
5:30 p.m.  
Program: Heart Truth for Women  
Green River District Health Department  
Bedford Walker Community Room
- 16 Unity Coalition**  
6:00 p.m.  
Program: Minority Housing Issues  
Panelists: David Condon, Executive Director, Owensboro Housing Authority; Bill Dixon, Owensboro Human Relations Commission; Sister Lorraine Lauter, Executive Director, MISAS; Ron Logsdon, Executive Director, Audubon Area Community Services; Juan Pena, Field Supervisor, Kentucky Commission on Human Rights  
Location: TBA

### Regularly Scheduled Public Meetings

*Meeting Dates and Times Subject to Change*

- Citizens Health Care Advocates**  
Second Thursday each month  
5:30 p.m.  
GRDHD, Bedford-Walker Community Room
- Daviess County Board of Education**  
Third Thursday each month  
6:00 p.m.  
1622 Southeastern Parkway
- Daviess County Fiscal Court**  
First and Third Thursday each month  
4:00 p.m.  
Daviess County Courthouse

- Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce "Rooster Booster" Breakfast**  
First Thursday each month  
7:30 a.m.  
Executive Inn
- Green River Health Council**  
Second Tuesday every other month (Feb, Apr, June, Aug, Oct, Dec)  
10:00 a.m.  
GRADD

*continued on pg. 23*

### VOLUNTEERISM AND PUBLIC LIFE

- Social connectedness is a much stronger predictor of the perceived quality of life in a community than the community's income or educational level.
- Youth volunteering is up since 1995, but the gap in volunteering between children with a college-graduate mother and children with a high-school dropout mother increased by almost 50 percent since 1976.
- Eighty-two percent of high school seniors volunteered in 2004, a 14 percent jump from 1986.
- In 2005, 42 percent of those volunteering became involved because they were asked by someone in the organization.
- Persons age 35 to 44 are most likely to volunteer (35 percent), closely followed by 45 to 54 year-olds (33 percent).
- Married persons volunteer at a higher rate (34 percent) than never-married persons (23 percent) and persons of other marital statuses (23 percent).
- Parents with children under age 18 are more likely to volunteer than persons without children of that age, 37 percent compared with 26 percent.
- Among volunteers with children under 18 years old, 45 percent of mothers and 36 percent of fathers volunteered mainly for an educational/youth service-related organization, such as a school or sports team.
- Employed persons are more likely to volunteer than the unemployed. Part-time workers participate in volunteer activities at a higher rate than full-time workers.
- In 2005, 45 percent of volunteers age 65 and over performed volunteer activities mainly through or for a religious organization, compared with 28 percent of volunteers age 16 to 24.
- Among volunteers in 2005, people with higher levels of educational attainment were more likely to provide professional or management assistance, tutor or teach, mentor youth, coach, referee, or supervise sports teams, or provide counseling, medical care, fire/EMS, or protective services. They were less likely to collect, prepare, distribute, or serve food, or be an usher, greeter, or minister.
- Participation in clubs and civic organizations has been cut by more than half over last 25 years.
- Joining one group cuts your odds of dying over the next year in half. Joining two groups cuts it by three quarters.

This Index and other items of interest can be found at The Owensboro Blog:  
<http://owensboro.blogspot.com>

## Public AGENDA, cont.

### Neighborhood Alliance Meetings

#### **Apollo Area Alliance**

Fourth Tuesday each month  
5:30 p.m.  
Apollo Heights Baptist Church.

#### **Audubon Bon Harbor Area Alliance**

Second Monday each month  
6:30 p.m.  
Audubon Church of the Nazarene

#### **Dogwood Azalea Neighborhood Alliance**

Third Thursday each month  
5:30 p.m.  
Daviness County Public Library

#### **Dugan Best Neighborhood Alliance**

Fourth Tuesday each month  
6:00 p.m.  
Dugan Best Recreation Center

#### **Hillcrest Area Alliance**

Second Tuesday each month  
6:30 p.m.  
Daviness County High School Media Center

#### **Midtown East Neighborhood Alliance**

First Thursday each month  
5:00 p.m.  
Buena Vista Baptist Church

#### **Northwest Neighborhood Alliance**

Fourth Tuesday each month  
5:30 p.m.  
Foust Elementary School Media Center

#### **Old Owensboro Neighborhood Alliance**

Second Tuesday each month  
5:30 p.m.  
Wendell Foster Center Administration Building Boardroom

#### **Seven Hills Neighborhood Alliance**

First Thursday each month  
7:00 p.m.  
Trinity United Methodist Church

#### **Shifley-York Neighborhood Alliance**

Second Tuesday each month  
5:30 p.m.  
Lewis Lane Baptist Church

#### **Southeast Alliance**

Second Thursday each month  
6:30 p.m.  
Newton Parrish Elementary School

#### **Wesleyan-Shawnee Neighborhood Alliance**

Fourth Tuesday each month  
6 p.m.  
Kentucky Wesleyan College, Winchester Center

#### **Owensboro Board of Education**

Fourth Thursday each month  
4:30 p.m.  
Boardroom

#### **Owensboro City Commission**

First and Third Tuesday each month  
5:00 p.m.  
City Hall

#### **Owensboro-Daviness County Regional Airport**

Third Monday of each month  
4:30 p.m.  
Airport terminal building conference room

#### **Owensboro Historic Preservation Board & Downtown Design Review Commission**

Fourth Wednesday each month  
5:00 p.m.  
City Hall

#### **Owensboro Housing Authority**

Fourth Thursday each month  
11:30 a.m.  
2161 E. 19th St.

#### **Owensboro Metropolitan Board of Adjustment**

First Thursday each month  
6:00 p.m.  
City Hall

#### **Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission**

Second Thursday each month  
6:00 p.m.  
City Hall

#### **Owensboro Riverport Authority**

Fourth Friday each month  
12:00 p.m.  
1771 River Road

#### **Owensboro Utility Commission**

Third Thursday each month  
4:00 p.m.  
2070 Tamarack Rd., Third floor board room

#### **Preservation Alliance of Owensboro-Daviness County, Inc.**

First Friday every other month (Feb, Apr, June, Aug, Oct, Dec)  
12:00 p.m.  
Campbell Club

#### **RWRA**

Third Monday each month (except January, Fourth Monday)  
3:30 p.m.  
RWRA, 1722 Pleasant Valley Road

#### **Tobacco Control Coalition**

Fourth Wednesday each month  
11:30 a.m.  
GRDHD

#### **Tourism & Convention Bureau**

Third Thursday each month  
7:45 a.m.  
215 E. Second St.

## Making a Difference

### **CHCA: OUR COMMUNITY'S PRIMARY FORUM FOR HEALTH CARE**

After four years of monthly broadcasts on public access television (OCTV), the meetings of Citizens Health Care Advocates have become our community's primary forum for health care. When a health care issue needs a public airing, when the public needs to work through diverse points of view or examine issues in-depth, they turn to CHCA as the vehicle to reach the community.

CHCA has not been afraid to tackle difficult, even controversial, issues: the elimination of the midwife program, the buyout of Catholic Health Partners and the restructuring of the governance of our local hospital, Medicaid, malpractice insurance, or the recent smoking ordinance.

Through "Action Alerts," CHCA has urged concerned citizens to share their views on the cigarette tax and other pivotal issues facing legislators and policy makers. While local issues have been the priority, CHCA programs have also featured out-of-town authorities on a single-payer national health system, organ transplant programs, insurance and the prescription drug industry.

More than 500 citizens have taken part in or observed CHCA programs. Thousands more have tuned in on Channel 51.

CHCA is an autonomous private, nonpartisan, nonprofit corporation governed by a 15-member board of directors. The organization is supported by the Public Life Foundation of Owensboro and other community sponsors. The Public Life Foundation does not request a seat on the CHCA board. CHCA charts its own course and sets its own priorities. Membership dues are voluntary.

In 2005, CHCA continued its five "fields of focus" – tracking community progress, legislation, and community opportunities to improve conditions and prospects in vital areas of health care access, lifestyle choices, governmental policies, health care/insurance costs, and organizational effectiveness.

### **ASSET BUILDING COALITION GEARS UP FOR TAX SEASON**

The Owensboro-Daviness County Asset Building Coalition, a collaborative effort of 30 nonprofit organizations, is dedicated to improving the financial conditions and prospects of local low- and moderate-income individuals and families. The coalition is currently recruiting volunteer tax preparers to assist individuals in claiming the Earned Income Tax Credit when they qualify. An estimated 20 percent of eligible workers in Daviness County do not apply. Local families may be losing as much as \$2 million.

The coalition also seeks to improve financial literacy and financial decision-making during a time of predatory lenders. Financial literacy is increasingly important for the 25 percent of all workers who earn \$8.75 or less per hour.

### **PRIDE PROMOTES IMPROVED ENTRYWAYS**

PRIDE, an organization that seeks to improve community appearance through public involvement, recently unveiled its "Passageways Plan" for two community gateways: the new entrance from the Natcher Bridge and the entrance from the Owensboro Regional Airport along Highway 56/Parrish Avenue.

Along these entryways, plans call for:

- a welcome center
- a system of paths linking lakes and leading to trail heads
- buffers to screen highway vistas from industrial uses, storage yards, and deteriorating residential or commercial properties
- public art
- rows and clusters of trees
- medians with wildflowers, attractive grasses and shrubs
- decorative lighting and underground/screened utilities
- attractive fencing and walls
- subdued commercial signs

The need to enhance our community entrances emerged as a priority in "Crafting a Community Vision" workshops conducted by PRIDE in 2001-2002. Hundreds of citizens participated in those workshops.

The plan is designed by Morgan McIlwain, a Lexington landscape architect, who incorporated citizen input from several public workshops conducted by PRIDE. Next steps include the development of more detailed construction drawings, cost estimates, sponsorship packages and an implementation schedule.



# Citizen Action UPDATE

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."*

Margaret Mead

To submit updates on citizen action: 685-2652 or info@plfo.org.

## Bring Back Baseball Committee

**Bruce Brubaker, chair**

bbrubaker@champion-ford.com

- Awaiting completion of a feasibility study (included in a study of a downtown arena); contributed \$10,000 toward the study

## The Citizens Committee on Education

**Marianne Smith Edge, co-chair**

msedge@smithedge.com

**Forrest Roberts, co-chair**

robbrook@adelphia.net

- Released a strategic higher education study in September, sharing the key findings throughout the community, following up on recommendations
- Developing "The Learning Community" program to instill a higher value of education and lifelong learning into the fabric of community life
- Subcommittees are examining a report on high achieving high schools, drop-out rates, and developing a parental involvement pamphlet

## Citizens Health Care Advocates

**Dale Taylor, chair**

dalet@wwwv.com

Meetings: Second Thursday of each month, 5:30 p.m., Green River District Health Department

- Continuing monthly programs on relevant topics and issues
- CHCA now has 122 members and 550 attendees and participants at meetings
- Meetings are broadcast on OCTV

## Coalition for the Poor

**Nancy Keeton, Keith Sanders, and Sharon Sharp (Steering Committee)**

c/o Public Life Foundation, 401 Frederica Street, Owensboro, KY 42301 (685-2652)

- Building a network of citizens who are concerned about the plight of the poor
- Sharing information and concerns regarding the impact that government social program cuts have on the poor
- Interested in leadership development programs that empower the poor

## Goodfellows Club

**Bruce Kunze, president**

bkunze1@aol.com

- Completed 2006 "Roll Call" campaign; exceeded \$101,000 goal at end of campaign; \$113,396 raised.
- Annually provide more than 1,000 children with winter coats, shoes, clothing and emergency assistance

## Owensboro Area World Affairs Council

**Stephanie Curran, president**

curranp@bellsouth.net

- Presented Morton Holbrook III, U. S. State Department: "The European Union: Does it Matter?"
- Presented humanitarian Tamara Quinn, founder of the Women's Alliance for a Democratic Iraq
- Presented Stephen Cohen, author and commentator: "The Real Danger in Russia."
- Planning the following programs in 2006:
  - Patterson School of Diplomacy Director John Stempel (January 26)
  - International Election Consultant George Russell (February 7)

## Owensboro Neighborhood Alliance

**Tracy Marksberry, coordinator**

marksbertm@owensboro.org

- Completing a SWOT Analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) to develop leadership skills at the grass roots neighborhood level
- Administering projects to inform and involve citizens and improve neighborhoods
- Alliances completing 2006 action plans

## PRIDE

**Susie Tyler, president**

grand.view@adelphia.net

- Conducted a workshop toward the development of a master plan on new community entrances from the Natcher Bridge and West Parrish Avenue from the airport
- Committees active in areas of beautification, public projects, architecture, and more
- Awarded beautification awards at 2005 Annual Meeting

## Unity Coalition

**Liz Seibert, project manager**

liz.seibert@plfo.org

- Planning 2006 series of programs on racial-ethnic issues including: panel discussion – "Minority Housing Issues" (Feb. 16)

## ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

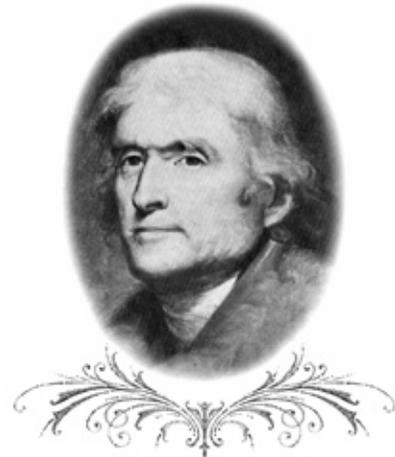
The *Public Life Advocate*, published bi-monthly, is committed to be a trusted resource of information and analysis of public concerns and community issues. The *Advocate* is a community-driven publication, grounded in a commitment to be "of the people, by the people, and for the people."

## ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

The Public Life Foundation of Owensboro, Inc. is a private, nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c) operating foundation (not a grant-making entity) founded in 1996 by John and Marjorie Hager. Mr. Hager is the former owner, editor, and publisher of the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer*.

The foundation fosters broad, meaningful citizen participation in community decisions and public policy. We believe that open, accessible, and trustful institutions are essential to an enlightened and engaged citizenry and the democratic process.

Foundation activities are driven by the importance that people attach to issues. We are committed to the people's agenda. To assist citizens in solving problems and seizing opportunities, we facilitate a process of information > deliberation > action.



*"I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education."*

*Thomas Jefferson*