



**DENVER**  
THE MILE HIGH CITY

**Human Rights & Community Relations**

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**How Low Can We Go?  
Human Needs and the Colorado State Budget**

Sometimes I think the issue is that Colorado is an anti-government state. Why else do we manage to be in the bottom 10 states when it comes to:

Food Stamps  
Housing Assistance  
Unemployment Benefits  
Health insurance for poor adults  
Health insurance for poor kids

But it isn't that Coloradans believe in private charity versus government. Coloradans earn 7% more than the average American, but give 9 percent less to charity. If we gave the same amount as the average American, that would increase charitable giving by \$489 million in Colorado.

Foundations can't rescue us singlehandedly. The total of all foundation giving in Colorado is just about \$246 million. And now government is competing with non-profits for foundation gifts, grants and donations.

Churches can't handle the needs singlehandedly. 29% of Coloradans attend church weekly. How can those few souls handle the needs for all of us.

Sometimes I describe our form of government here in Colorado as "Every man for himself" or "Survival of the Fittest".

But I celebrate whenever I am proven wrong. We will need all sectors, every governmental agency, every nonprofit and civic group, and voters, donors and advocates to work together to address the needs of our State. The new State Economic Opportunity and Poverty Reduction Task Force is working on this.

We have made some gains --not using the general fund -- in the past two years when it comes to helping those in need:

- We increased the monthly TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) or "welfare" grant from \$356 for a family of three to \$570 per month.
- We gave the PUC authority to expand programs like low income Telephone Assistance
- A new hospital provider fee will greatly expand coverage for low income patients
- We modernized our unemployment insurance system in exchange for \$127 million in federal stimulus money.





But, looking at Colorado:

- Only 8% of families in poverty get cash welfare
- Only 23% of low income households get subsidized housing
- Only 26% unemployed workers get unemployment insurance
- Only 54% of those eligible get food stamps.
- Only about one in 6 low income families with children get subsidized child care

We have also rolled back recent gains, as part of budget cuts

- Eligibility for CHP was to have increased to 225% of FPL from 205% of FPL, then reversed
- Planned expansion of Colorado pre-school slots and Full day kindergarten was reversed

As the budget shortfall grows, advocates scramble to protect priority programs.

I had a nightmare the other night about being in a tornado while only the most secure parts of my house's foundation did not blow away. That is kind of like living in Colorado. Programs protected by the federal or state constitution, legal decisions or a requirement as a condition for receiving stimulus money might weather the storm. But anything else could disappear.

- Aid to the Needy Disabled was slated for abolishment, but this proposal was later withdrawn.
- Now Old Age Pension for LEGAL immigrants is slated for cuts.
- Mental health beds have been cut.
- TANF needs are projected to outpace the Federal TANF Block Grant in a couple years

We are in a world of trouble. Most of us here have our priority interests and our own list of most critical services. But every dollar is spoken for.

I remember talking with an older gentleman during the post 9/11 round of budget cutting... He had gone to the State Capitol to testify against the suspension of the Homestead Property Tax exemption for seniors. While waiting for the bill to be heard, he had to sit through testimony on the previous bill. That cost-cutting bill eliminated home based respite nursing care for kids who required 24 hour line of sight nursing care to keep breathing tubes clear so they could stay alive. The respite care allowed parents to sleep for 8 hours. After hearing the testimony, when it was his turn he told legislators he understood why they had to suspend the Senior Property Tax exemption.

The economic has causes current revenue streams to slow to a trickle. Revenue also is constricted by our current State Constitution. But we are facing some immediate questions. Does the State balance its budget only by slashing programs? Or does it also look a saving some critical services by eliminating sales tax exclusions, and tax credits and exemptions?



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