

# PUBLIC LIFE *Advocate*

March 2006 – Volume 3, Issue 2  
Owensboro, Kentucky

Prepared for college,  
prepared for life?

Remedial programs, higher expectations  
and creative partnerships key to education gains  
in Owensboro-Daviess County

**Framing the Issue:**  
Fairness in local taxation

**Raising Wages**  
Are mandates effective?

**Time for Dialogue**  
On government and school  
system unification



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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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# Prepared for college, prepared for life?

Remedial programs, higher expectations  
and creative partnerships key to education  
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# Dialogue is long overdue

Public is largely uninformed about local governments and school systems



by Rodney Berry

As the city-county government unification task force prepares its March 20 final report, some members are perplexed that the public has shown little interest in its work. Only a handful of non-members attended any of the bi-weekly open meetings since the group was named more than a year ago.

Meanwhile, Owensboro and Daviess County school boards charge ahead with projects, programs and priorities with no apparent interest in discussing a consolidated system that some analysts say is inevitable, considering the landlocked nature of the city school district and its increasing reliance on shrinking federal education dollars.

Is there any need to proceed with public dialogue on these issues? Is it worth the time and effort?

One thing is for sure: There is a correlation between information and engagement. If citizens were aware of how we currently do things – and pay for things – they would insist on a better way. (See “What about fairness?” page 10.)

In community forums conducted by our foundation, we have been surprised how many participants – including longtime local residents – are unfamiliar with how their governments and school systems are structured and the funding inequities that characterize them.

This must change.

The apparent lack of interest in the work of the city-county unification task force and the indifference of the school boards should not be a deterrent. These forums can be successful through a well-crafted plan. We respectfully offer the following suggestions:

**Make it a collaborative effort.** Forums should be designed and coordinated by a cross-section of interested, credible community groups. Our foundation would welcome the opportunity to be involved, but the Owensboro Neighborhood Alliance, Community Conversations, Citizens Committee on Education, school councils and PTO’s, local colleges-universities, Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Owensboro, foundations, civic organizations and others could have leadership roles and attract members and those on their mailing lists to the forums.

**Take it to the people.** There should be many convenient opportunities for citizens to participate: dozens of forums, in every

neighborhood, at different days and times, involving and welcoming people from all walks of life. We should use schools, churches, community centers, volunteer fire departments and other meeting facilities throughout the city, suburbs and rural areas. Sessions should be promoted aggressively through advertising, news releases, church bulletins, posters and handbills, utility bill inserts, school-to-parent newsletters, e- and standard mail...any and every creative technique leaders can devise.

**Prepare a solid basis of information.** Every participant should receive the same information using printed dialogue guides, handouts, Power Point presentation and display charts. Information should be accurate, balanced, clear and concise enough so that people from all walks of life can understand the material and trust in its objectivity.

**Structure forums to maximize participation.** Forums should be structured carefully using trained moderators and recorders. Consistent formats should include small group discussions so all participants will be comfortable and contribute. Ground rules should ensure a climate of mutual respect and civility.

**Capture views and themes.** Participants should be reminded to keep an open mind and postpone judgment until they have heard from all points of view. Toward the end of the discussion period, participants should either complete questionnaires or reach common ground on principles or action steps.

This exercise in community dialogue will not only educate participants about these issues, it will bring forth a critical mass of concerned citizens who want to be involved in follow-up actions.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan said, “Every-one is entitled to their opinion, but not their own set of facts.” It is time to face the fact that the structure of local governments and school systems represent a fundamental community shortcoming.

Our community will be well-served by reviewing the facts and engaging in honest and civil dialogue around these issues. We can only make progress when our institutions are more efficient, fair and positioned for a competitive future. We can only make progress when we are guided by the collective wisdom of a well-informed public.

Let the process begin. ■

## Contributors

### Tom Gaston



“Notwithstanding my sense that this alarmism about our failing schools is overblown, there certainly is slack in our high schools, especially in the largely-wasted senior year,” concludes the retired educator and frequent contributor.

“I remember when voices warned ominously that Russian schools were producing platoons of super scientists and engineers while we turned out intellectual midgets. Yet as an elder who oversees my grandson’s homework, I see him covering material in the third grade that I taught in college.”

### Lydia Johnson



As legislators assess the need for wage increases against the ramifications of regulatory strategies to accomplish that objective, Lydia found that “raising the minimum wage is just one step to fighting poverty. We must also encourage the Earned Income Tax Credit, increase access to

education and create a supportive network that enables low-income families and individuals to succeed.”

A former *Messenger-Inquirer* reporter (1999-2003), Lydia is now Audubon Area Community Services Public Information and Outreach Director. In 2000, she received a Kentucky Press Association award for investigative reporting and, in 2001, was awarded a fellowship from the National Press Foundation.

### Nancy Keeton

Self-described citizen, teacher (Brescia University), social worker, advocate, mother, daughter and grandmother, Nancy’s essay is a timely submission following the recent adoption of a countywide smoking ordinance. Her piece is not a plea for understanding, forgiveness, or validation, but an effort to bring attention to the broader issues of treatment for smoking addiction.

### Chad Gesser



Director of Institutional Research at Owensboro Community and Technical College, Chad founded the local Conversations Café chapter and [owensboro.blogspot.com](http://owensboro.blogspot.com). He also established a web site to track local-regional public health conditions and trends.

## Laments of a smoker

By Nancy Keeton, Owensboro



A lot of people want me to stop smoking cigarettes. My mother would like for me to stop (although she says little about it) because, I suspect, she would like to think I will live at least as long as she has. She just turned 80, and never smoked cigarettes herself. She has been exposed over the long-term to secondhand smoke generated by my father, my grandfather, my step-father, and until recently, me. I don't smoke in the house anymore.

My friends would like for me to stop because they like me and want me around for a while longer, and because my clothes and car, and probably me, smell like old ashtrays. I also suspect they get a little annoyed at having to wait while I run outside every couple of hours for a smoke.

My granddaughter would like for me to stop smoking because she loves me and because all those lectures I gave her when she was growing up about not smoking may have actually made a difference in her anti-smoking behavior.

I think my doctor would like for me to quit smoking. He says that if I do, I'll lower my bad cholesterol, raise my good cholesterol and lower my triglycerides.

I think my health insurance carrier would like for me to quit smoking too, but unfortunately, my health insurance does not allow for any type of intensive inpatient treatment for smoking cessation. The implication for me is that if I were just strong-willed enough, I could overcome the habit. (Anybody remember that from the years before alcoholism became a disease?)

Evidently my local government wants me to quit smoking cigarettes, too, at least in public places. But, as with other entities, it seems not to be ready to put real help in place for those who want to quit.

I suspect that Governor Fletcher, a physician, would like for me to stop smoking as well, but evidently not as much as he wants others to quit drinking alcohol and using other drugs. We have facilities planned for alcohol and drug addiction other than to tobacco, but if I remember right, we have a hot line available for those who are addicted to smoking cigarettes. (When I read the announcement about the hot line and saw that the tobacco companies claimed not to be worried about the effect they would have on the tobacco industry, I thought, "Well, duh!")

A quick search of the articles on smoking cigarettes available in journals quickly confirms the notion that smoking cigarettes is addictive behavior. Some scientists are taking the matter very seriously and some are even searching for genetic links to smoking behavior and addiction. Below are a couple of the hundreds of pieces of information I found in only a few minutes:

*Smoking is a leading risk factor for a great number of debilitating and deadly diseases, and addiction to nicotine is one of the principle factors that keeps many people smoking and makes it difficult for many to quit. (National Institutes of Health, 2005)*

*Kids can become addicted to cigarettes very quickly and even one puff may be enough to hook them, according to a study published*

*in Tobacco Control Research from the University of Massachusetts medical school. It reports that "there does not appear to be a minimum nicotine dose or duration of use as a prerequisite for symptoms to appear." (Medical Post, Toronto, 2002)*

I also found a questionnaire in the 2001 Medical Post. I scored a five. I don't know exactly what that means but I'll bet it's not good. I wish I was a zero.

A quick and easy way to assess the level of a patient's nicotine dependency is the Fagerstrom Test for Nicotine Dependency, which consists of six questions.

Each answer is assigned a score and tallied so a patient will accumulate a total score from zero (low nicotine dependency) to 10 (high dependency).

### Here are the questions, and possible scores:

1. How soon after waking do you have your first cigarette?

- Within five minutes 3 points
- Within 30 minutes 2 points
- Within 60 minutes 1 point

2. Do you find it difficult to refrain from smoking in places where it is forbidden?

- Yes 1 point
- No 0 points

3. Do you continue to smoke even though you are at home sick in bed?

- Yes 1 point
- No 0 points

4. What cigarette would you find it most difficult to give up?

- The first one of the day 1 point
- Any other 0 points

5. Do you smoke more frequently after waking than during the rest of the day?

- Yes 1 point
- No 0 points

6. How many cigarettes do you smoke in a day?

- 10 or fewer 0 points
- 11 to 20 1 point
- 21 to 30 2 points
- 31 or more 3 points

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# Prepared for college, prepared for life?

Remedial programs, higher expectations  
and creative partnerships key to education  
gains in Owensboro-Daviess County

*By Tom Gaston*

As business leaders express dismay that the U.S. workforce is losing its competitive edge in technology and the sciences, increasing numbers of educators and concerned citizens point an accusing finger at American high schools.

Scores on the federal government's report card for public schools, the National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP, show that American students make rapid gains in elementary school, slow a bit in middle school and stall in senior high.

Critics point out that large numbers of college freshmen must take remedial courses in key subjects. In recent months, blue ribbon committees in Kentucky have issued reports questioning the cost of this extensive remediation and calling for sweeping changes in secondary schools.

A review of the evidence indicates that Owensboro and Daviess County high schools compare well with others in Kentucky and that Kentucky schools rank reasonably well in the nation.

However, the facts also indicate that, here as elsewhere:

- Too many students drop out of high school.
- Too few high school graduates go on to college.
- Too few of those who enter college successfully complete their degree work.
- Too many college freshmen must take remedial courses before tackling college-level work in key subjects.
- The costs of remediation are extremely high, both for the colleges providing the instruction and for students who must pay increased tuition and delay their graduation.

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Some see this as the latest eruption of alarmism that has surfaced every few years at least as far back as 1958 when, with the Russians temporarily ahead in the space race, the Rickover report placed blame on American education. "The chronic shortage of good scientists, engineers and other professionals which plagues us," Admiral Hyman G. Rickover declared, "is the result of time wasted in public schools which must be made up later on."

Others such as Willard Daggett of the International Center for Leadership in Education, which is collaborating with the Kentucky Department of Education on improving the state's high schools, argue that this time the threat is real and imminent. Daggett, president of the center, says four major trends are already in play and will soon converge in a perfect storm to swamp the U.S. economy unless we improve American secondary schools quickly.

The four trends Daggett identifies are globalization, technology, demographic trends and changing values and attitudes. He points to emerging competition from Eastern Europe, India and China. "We have witnessed the rapid spread of capitalism to over half the world's population in just 16 years."

These populations "recognize the energy and sacrifices required of them," he said. "Our youth . . . seem to believe it is their birthright to enjoy a middle class lifestyle . . . We lack the drive needed to match the aggressiveness of other nations in the global economy."

While dubious about some of Daggett's arguments, local college presidents echo his concern about students' failure to take studies seriously. "I am surprised at the lackadaisical attitude of students coming and not understanding that it's a competitive world," said Anne Federlein, president, Kentucky Wesleyan College.

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**"... students neglect their studies because they work too much to earn money for items such as cars and clothes."**

**Sister Vivian Bowles  
President  
Brescia University**

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President Vivian M. Bowles of Brescia University agrees. In high school, Bowles

said, students neglect their studies because they work too much to earn money for items such as cars and clothes. Having tasted relative affluence, they insist on working when they get to college.

"They drive much better cars than a lot of our faculty," she said. "But they feel that since they work so many hours they shouldn't have to put in the required amount of study time."

## **How big a problem?**

At Brescia, only about 50 students, out of their 600, require remediation each year. Bowles attributes that, in part, to their selective admission policy and in part to the fact that they make intensive tutoring available to all students.

Even though freshmen at Kentucky Wesleyan score slightly higher than the Kentucky average on their ACT tests, about 20 percent of their 680 students need remedial instruction in math, English or reading. Owensboro Community and Technical College enrolls 22 percent of its 5,100 students in at least one remedial class. In addition, its tutoring staff helped 1,406 students an average of five times each in the semester just ended, college officials said.

Math is by far the biggest challenge for freshmen, according to local college officials. Math is followed closely by reading deficiencies and often is combined with them. Many students still need additional help with writing, even though performance in that area has improved with the implementation of the Kentucky Educational Reform Act passed in 1990.

## **The costs**

Remedial instruction is expensive. To provide the necessary individualized attention, classes must be limited to 16 to 20 students. Taking these courses means students typically pay extra tuition without receiving credit toward a degree and ultimately lose income (because they delay graduation). Since the extra tuition almost never covers all the cost of providing remediation, the balance, in one form or another, must be covered by taxpayers.

State Senate Majority Leader Dan Kelly, R-Springfield, recently estimated in a television interview that Kentuckians pay \$25 million a year for remedial instruction. Students or their parents pay \$11 million of this, he said, and taxpayers pick up \$14 million.

The Brescia remediation program costs about \$250,000, according to college officials. Almost all of that has been covered by a federal grant, according to Dolores Kiesler, director of student support services. But signs are that much of the federal funding will soon be withdrawn, she said.

From figures provided by the Owensboro Community and Technical College, the Public Life Advocate estimates the cost of its program to be about \$295,700.

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**"... Kentuckians pay \$25 million a year on remedial instruction. Students or their parents pay \$11 million of this ... and taxpayers pick up \$14 million."**

**Dan Kelly  
State Senate Majority Leader**

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## **What's to be done?**

Proposals for dealing with the problem vary according to what educators and advocates believe are the causes.

## **Get tougher**

Prominent among the voices calling for an across-the-board toughening of high school requirements is Nick Brake, president and CEO of the Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corporation. Brake, who helped launch Owensboro's Discover College to bridge the gap between high school and higher education, supports his argument for higher expectations by citing reports from the American Diploma Project and ACT.

"The ACT study actually said that students who decide not to go to college should take a more rigorous high school curriculum than those going to college" so that they will be prepared for the workplace, Brake said. Students going directly into the workplace need those skills right away if they are to earn a good living, Brake explained, whereas students in college will receive additional instruction and mentoring. "The associate degree today is the high school diploma of 50 or 20 years ago," he observed.

Brake served on a task force of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, which issued a report in May 2005 calling for requiring all high school students to complete the Kentucky Scholars course of study. Those requirements are:

Four credits in English

Three credits in mathematics: algebra I, geometry and algebra II (The committee also recommended requiring a pre-calculus course.)

## WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

- Of 100 ninth graders who enter high school in Kentucky, only 68 graduate.
- Of the 68 who graduate from high school, only 39 go to college.
- Of the 39 who enroll in college, only 15 have graduated within six years.
- The U.S. trails most developed countries in high school graduation rate, ranking 16th among the 30 member nations in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- About 40% of American high school graduates are unprepared for college and work, according to the graduates, their employers and college professors.
- The U.S. college graduation rate (66 percent) is below average among developed nations.
- Bachelor's degrees in science and engineering make up five percent of the degrees awarded in the U.S., but 60 percent of those awarded in China.
- Nearly half of the U.S. enrollments in science, technology, engineering and mathematics are by students who are non-U.S. citizens.
- By 2010, it is predicted that 90 percent of the world's scientists and engineers will be in Asia.

Three credits in science: biology, chemistry and physics

Three and one half courses in social sciences (chosen from U.S. history, world history, world geography, economics and government)

Two credits in a language other than English.

Since then, the Kentucky Board of Education has voted to require all students to complete four math credits during high school, including algebra II.

Helen Mountjoy of Daviess County, a member and former chair of the state Board of Education, said requiring another year of math of all students "is a good step in helping kids become more successful at the college level." Currently, many students finish taking math as juniors and may lose what they've learned before they start college, she said. "We know that taking that year off really makes a difference in what you retain," she said.

But will toughening graduation requirements leave struggling students in the dust? The Prichard Committee report emphasized that high schools must change in other ways so that students get the instructional support they will need to meet the tougher requirements. Mountjoy pointed out that the state board also specified that school districts could teach the required math "core content" in nontraditional ways, partly as a way of reaching students who have trouble with it.

Local educators agree that simply demanding more is a recipe for failure. "If it were that easy, we would have done it a long time ago," said Larry Vick, superintendent of Owensboro Public Schools.

Vick said it's clear that students who have had rigorous courses do better in college than those who haven't – but that experience shows that students who take those courses

have other advantages, including their parents' expectations that they'll go to college and have good work and study habits.

"The kids that are going to be successful are taking the tougher courses," he said. "They are not successful because they are taking the tougher courses."

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**"The kids that are going to be successful are taking the tougher courses ... They are not successful because they are taking the tougher courses."**

**Larry Vick, superintendent  
Owensboro Public Schools**

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Mountjoy said the challenge, then, is for schools to help all students benefit from the high expectations that were demanded in the Kentucky Education Reform Act: "I think they (expectations) come from three different sources – parents setting expectations for their children, students setting expectations for themselves, and educators setting expectations for students.

"Certainly some students come from homes where education is not the foremost concern, probably putting food on the table is the foremost concern ... so it's even more important that the other adults they interact with have high expectations for them. If we don't, they're not going to succeed."

At the same time, teachers and tutors of remedial students emphasize that social, psychological, and financial influences, rather than indifference or intellectual capacity, often suppress students' school performance.

"We have families that are pretty disoriented today," said Judy Coomes, program coordinator, Owensboro Community and Technical College Teaching and Learning Center. "We have students who have to work because they're in single-parent homes and that child is expected to pay his own bills and maybe help mom with hers."

Coomes taught in Owensboro Public Schools before joining the community college. "So I see both sides of the fence," she says. "A lot of our students are paying everything. They're supporting their car, their insurance as well as their tuition. Most of them are still living at home, but some are not even doing that."

## Reorganize high schools

Many reformers argue that the needs of the 21st century require a different kind of secondary school. One often-suggested change is measuring individual students' actual accomplishment rather than "seat time" in the classroom.

"We've got to be more flexible," said Tom Shelton, superintendent of Daviess County Public Schools. "We've looked at the K-12 experience, traditionally, as a 13-year model. Well, maybe some children can do that in 10 years but some maybe it takes 16."

Shelton thinks major changes are necessary if high schools are to begin sending a bigger proportion of students to college. "We send basically our top students to those institutions right now, and the retention rate is really scary to me." He proposes "looking at both sides of the equation, our preparation as well as their programs."

Mountjoy agreed. The state Department of Education already has a "Refocusing Secondary Education" initiative which is piloting alternative approaches to instruction.

At the same time, the way the state trains and supports teachers and administrators "needs to be changed radically," she said. "We haven't figured out the best ways yet."

High schools would also benefit from different ways of teaching traditional subjects, and math is a prime example, educators say.

To turn out students who can read and understand today's complicated technical manuals Vick said, "We need to re-do the high school curriculum to give them tech reading and practical mathematics in a more usable form ... I don't disagree with the fact that they need a very rigorous course, but the relevancy (is also important)."

Vick's emphasis on teaching for relevance also strikes the right note with Guy Mauldin, Johnson City, Tenn., a nationally regarded

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authority on the teaching of mathematics. “Remediation doesn’t work if they teach the same basic math over and over in the same way,” he said.

Interestingly, however, asking students to apply what they’re learning can actually accelerate their progress, he said. “Research shows that if you ask people to multiply  $1\frac{3}{4}$  x 1.67 many can’t do it. But if you ask them what  $1\frac{3}{4}$  yards of cloth would cost at \$1.67 a yard, most people can figure it out. Applica-

tion is actually easier.”

Mauldin draws on long experience teaching math in high school and college to present workshops for teachers and write tests for the College Board and Educational Testing Service (ETS), the organization that publishes the ACT. The instructional problem, he said, is that most math teachers are abstract thinkers who only know to teach math as they were taught.

Mauldin supports an “integrated” ap-

proach embodying abstract mathematical principles in concrete problem situations. In that context, he said, “Most people find written problems much easier.”

## Changing what’s evaluated

Some authorities pointed to the state-mandated assessment system, the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System or CATS, as one source of the problem. “KERA drives our whole curriculum,” Shelton said.

## Causes & Cures

Item #	Suggested Cause	Suggested Remedy	Suggested Disadvantages
1	Students avoid rigorous classes.	Make the recommended pre-college curriculum the default curriculum for all students.	This will increase the dropout rate, which is already unacceptably high. Others say that experience shows that doesn’t happen if there’s proper instructional support – but providing that support costs money, and state and local governments are strapped as it is.
2	Students take the rigorous classes so early in high school that their skills have grown “rusty” from disuse by the time they reach college.	Include challenging courses in math and English in the senior year of high school.	Seniors already devote much of their time working on their writing portfolios. This is also a traditional time for time-consuming “rites of passage” that are highly valued as part of the high school experience.
3	Bright students whose parents are not college graduates often don’t even consider going to college.	Require all students to take the ACT in their junior year. Urge those with the best scores to consider college and, if they have not done so, to take college prep courses.	Because many college-bound students would take their math courses earlier to ensure they did well on the ACT, this would increase the risk of their skills growing rusty before college. On the other hand, the state Board of Education recently voted to require four years of math for all high school students in Kentucky.
4	Many students do well at mastering day-to-day assignments but fail to comprehend the “big picture” and synthesize what they have learned.	Require demanding end-of-course tests in key high school courses, preferably tests constructed by outside agencies unconnected with the school.	Besides the significant cost, this would only add to the multiplicity of “accountability” measures that already take too much time away from instruction.
5	Both in high school and college, students work too much and neglect their studies because of it.	Ensure that all students understand the implications of globalization for their future job security.	For many students, working is the only way they can afford to continue their education. Some studies show that students working 10-20 hours a week actually do better in school.
6	Conventional teaching methods in math make concepts unnecessarily difficult for average students to grasp.	Use practical problems in everyday settings that embody the abstract principles to be taught. Combine rigor with relevancy.	Math teachers (including the traditional abstract thinkers) are already in extremely short supply. More selective requirements will intensify this shortage.
7	There is a “misalignment” between the high school curriculum and college expectations.	Replace Kentucky’s statewide assessment for high school with the ACT, which covers reading, writing, math and science.	Concentrating on reading, writing, math and science neglects the importance of arts, humanities and many skills needed for daily living. (The state legislature is considering making the ACT part, but not all, of the high school CATS test.)
8	The CATS tests are so broad in scope that they force teachers to emphasize “coverage” at the expense of mastery.	Narrow the scope of the state’s standards and CATS test so that teachers can make sure students understand what is covered.	Depth can be achieved without narrowing the curriculum, if teachers emphasize the pattern of “big ideas” in the current curriculum.
9	Because scholarships are often tied to students’ grade point average, some college-bound students feel they have no incentive to jeopardize their GPAs by taking rigorous courses.	Offer Advanced Placement courses or arrange “dual-credit” courses so that students who perform well can earn college credit while still in high school. Award Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarships only to students who take challenging courses.	Critics say that sometimes dual-credit classes do little more than give college credit for traditional high school work. Where rigorous end-of-course tests are in place, this solution works well for motivated students.
10	The public resists change. Too many adults are convinced high schools should continue to be what they have been for the past 50 years.	Develop a statewide marketing and education campaign to alert the public to what’s required for success in the 21st century.	We’ve had education marketing campaigns in the past, but Kentuckians still aren’t going to college in dramatically higher numbers.

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“In my personal opinion, the core content of the curriculum is a mile wide and an inch deep.”

Brescia’s Kiesler agrees. Teachers spread themselves thin trying to cover everything on the test, she says. “Instead of being able to teach ... for lifelong learning, teachers are being forced to teach to a specific test. That’s how students are being cheated of their education.”

A March 2004 report prepared by HumRRo, a Virginia-based human resource research organization for the Kentucky Department of Education said it does appear that Kentucky teachers are focusing their instructional efforts toward the tests.

That detracts from time that teachers would otherwise spend teaching the higher level concepts that are measured by the ACT and badly needed by college-bound students, the report said.

Mountjoy did not disagree that the CATS assessment covers too much territory – but that, she said, is because Kentucky’s core content (what teachers are expected to cover) is so broad. Currently the board is revising the core content to address concerns about its breadth, which will also affect CATS. The revised core content will identify the most important concepts for students to learn at each grade level, she said.

However she also said that the assessment has helped the state make strides forward in student learning, as evidenced by scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which have improved more rapidly than most states’.

When it was implemented in the early 1990s, the assessment helped ensure that all schools across Kentucky covered what was believed to be important for students to know – something that had not been done in the past, she said. Now, the federal No Child Left Behind law requires all states to have assessments, and Kentucky’s compares favorably to others, she said.

“If you have a statewide test, there is going to be teaching to the test,” she said. The real question, then, is whether “we have a test that’s worth teaching to,” she said.

Carolyn Witt Jones, executive director of the Partnership for Successful Schools, a statewide group based in Lexington, said Kentucky’s core content and the way it’s measured are “solid.” (The Partnership was created in the early 1990s by Kentucky’s major employers, UPS, Ashland and Humana, to support school reform. The Partnership is also the group which introduced the Kentucky State Scholars program to many Kentucky schools.)

“There probably need to be more diagnostic tools to make sure that parents and teachers and kids know where they stand on a regular basis. But (the core content, on which the test is based) has constantly been ... upgraded. The test itself has been looked at, modified. So it’s not like we’re re doing the same test that we did in the early 90s.”

As to whether the Kentucky core content tests pressure teachers to focus on weaker students, Jones said, “You are really talking about kind of a dumbing down ... We just haven’t seen that happening.” Jones said her organization had not looked specifically at whether the test measures higher-level skills in math.

However Kentucky’s Department of Education and Council on Postsecondary Education recently participated in The American Diploma Project, which examined whether the reading and math standards in Kentucky and several other states meet the needs of both colleges and employers. As a result of that review, Kentucky is looking at how to more closely align what’s taught in high school and what’s needed afterward.

### Advanced placement and dual enrollment courses

One promising development is the increasingly frequent enroll-

## Why do college students falter?

*Public Life Advocate* interviews elicited a wide range of reasons that so many college freshmen arrive unprepared for college-level study. Among them:

“There is an alignment problem between what the state expects students to know from the high school curriculum and what colleges expect students to know. In math, sciences and writing, the high school curriculum is built upon very different kinds of expectations.”

– Nick Brake, president/CEO, Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corporation; former dean of institutional effectiveness, Owensboro Community and Technical College

“The biggest problem is our basic accountability model that determines the curriculum down to the point, at the individual grade level, of what particular classes should be taught and to what level. It’s basically forcing teachers to teach this breadth of knowledge instead of adjusting to the needs of students and leading them to mastery. . . . In my personal opinion, the core content of this curriculum is a mile wide and an inch deep.”

– Tom Shelton, superintendent, Daviess County Public Schools

“I would say that students are not as well prepared as they were in past years. We find that some worked so much during high school and were involved in other school activities that they are not as eager to study ... I think more students are into immediate gratification.”

– Vivian M. Bowles, president, Brescia University

“There is one factor that absolutely jumps out as to whether or not a student will have to take remediation, and that is the rigor of the high school that they come from ... the rigor of the high school and whether or not the parents went to college.”

– Jacqueline Addington, president, Owensboro Community and Technical College

“I don’t like to blame the parents. They send us the best kids they’ve got, and the overwhelming majority are the best parents they know how to be ... There are a bunch of reasons [students don’t learn math]. There is a dearth of qualified math teachers. Math deficiencies “accumulate.” Other subjects have regular “start over” places where a student can begin studying and still do well overall. Math doesn’t have those. And math teachers tend to be abstract thinkers. They tend to teach the way they were taught when most students learn better with concrete problems in context.”

– Guy Mauldin, nationally regarded expert on mathematics teaching and testing; author and reader of Advanced Placement Exams for the Educational Testing Service and instructional programs for the College Entrance Examination Board

“Education has been a whipping post for society whenever things go wrong ... There are students they hire, yes, who cannot read and write and do math, but I think it’s grossly overrated ... I believe that with more and more pressure on business, they then come back to us and say their students are not prepared ... I have been a consultant in business, and they have this wonderful idea that this 22-year-old is going to come in and do wonderful things in their business, and they’re going to be very, very successful, when in fact it’s the CEO, CFO and CIO who are really struggling with what to do with students who come in with all this technology, and they’re not ready for them.”

– Anne Federlein, president, Kentucky Wesleyan College

“It wasn’t so much the academics as that [the college dropouts she knows] hadn’t been away from home any length of time and they were thrown into social situations they weren’t prepared for ... Maybe they had not had a parent who had gone to college, and so they ran into an obstacle, and there was no experience there to deal with it.”

– Forrest Roberts, attorney and co-chair, Citizens Committee on Education

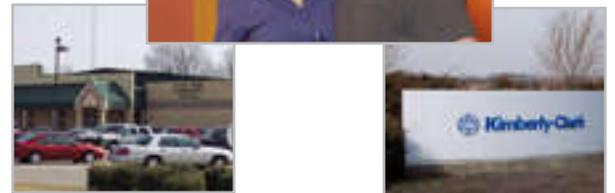
“I don’t think we can draw a line in the sand and say, ‘Now we have it right,’ but I think we have to avoid being simplistic by saying, ‘Well if we give every student the ACT, this is the answer.’ I think what we have learned is that there are very few simplistic answers to this whole issue.”

– Carolyn Witt Jones, executive director, Partnership for Successful Schools, a statewide group based in Lexington.

# WHAT ABOUT FAIRNESS?

Local tax structure has many inequities

By Rodney Berry



One couple lives on Waverly Place. The husband works at the Earthgrains Bakery and his wife works at a downtown bank.

Another couple lives in the Thoroughbred East subdivision. The husband works at the Kimberly Clark plant and his wife teaches at Eastview Elementary School.

Each couple earns the same amount of money. Their homes and cars have the same value. But in 2006, one couple will pay 92 percent (\$873) more in local taxes. Over a 40-year work life, the difference is more than \$56,000.

There are differences in government services from one area to another, but most people do not notice the difference. Is such a disparity justified? Is this right? Is this fair?

# Framing the Issue: What About Fairness?

## What is it costing me?

As the City-County Unification Task Force completes its work on whether local governments should merge, the central question among citizens continues to be “What will it cost me?” The task force examined services, departmental efficiency, representation and other local government issues. Members remain divided on whether or not unification is the most appropriate option for local government. Some acknowledge the advantages of consolidation, but these benefits seldom override concerns about the bottom line.

“What will it cost me?” is a legitimate question, but so is “What is it already costing me?” This issue brief summarizes the current inequities in our local system of taxation and the impact of those inequities over a working life of 40 years.



These inequities exist in three ways:

- through city and county government occupational taxes
- through city and county government property taxes
- through city and county school property taxes

## LOCAL TAX RATE SUMMARY

Taxes that *change* depending on where one lives and works:



City government

1.33 percent occupational tax  
*paid by people who work in Owensboro*

25.8 cents per \$100 assessed value real estate property tax  
*paid by people who own real estate in Owensboro*

30.3 cents per \$100 assessed value personal property tax  
*paid by Owensboro residents who own automobiles*



City schools

70.4 cents per \$100 assessed value real estate property tax  
*paid by people who own real estate in Owensboro school district*

70.4 cents per \$100 assessed value personal property tax  
*paid by Owensboro school district residents who own automobiles*



County government

.5 percent occupational tax  
*paid by people who work outside Owensboro in Daviess County*

12.7 cents per \$100 assessed value real estate property tax  
*paid by people who own real estate in Owensboro and Daviess County*

17 cents per \$100 assessed value personal property tax  
*paid by Owensboro and Daviess County residents who own automobiles*

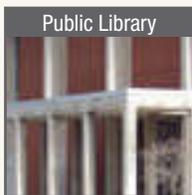


County schools

53.6 cents per \$100 assessed value real estate property tax  
*paid by people who own real estate outside the Owensboro school district in the Daviess County school district*

53.6 cents per \$100 assessed value personal property tax  
*paid by people who own automobiles outside the Owensboro school district in the Daviess County school district*

Taxes that *are the same* no matter where one lives and works in Daviess County:



Public Library

5.7 cents per \$100 assessed value real estate property tax  
5.7 cents per \$100 assessed value personal property tax



Extension Office

.9 cents per \$100 assessed value real estate property tax  
1 cent per \$100 assessed value personal property tax



Health

3.5 cents per \$100 assessed value real estate property tax  
3.5 cents per \$100 assessed value personal property tax



Insurance

4 percent of insurance premiums  
*Note: city and county rate is slightly different*

## DID YOU KNOW...

- that school real estate taxes comprise between 66-70 percent of your total local real estate taxes?
- that city school real estate taxes are almost three times higher than city government real estate taxes?
- that county school real estate taxes are more than four times higher than county government real estate taxes?
- that city and county governments have no control over school taxes?
- that city school taxes are 31 percent higher than county school taxes?
- that as growth has occurred beyond the city, city school population has decreased, but its percentage of at-risk students has increased and the system has become more reliant on federal funds?
- that the boundaries of our local public school systems were fixed more than 50 years ago? Unlike city government, the city school district is landlocked and cannot annex property. Consequently, most of our community's residential, commercial and

industrial growth during this period has enhanced the county school tax base exclusively.

- that city and/or county governments appoint members to the governing boards of the public library, health department, extension office and tourist commission, but as special taxing entities, these boards set their own tax rates?
- that workers in the city pay occupational taxes that are more than 2½ times greater than what workers in the county pay?

### that when you...

live in the city

live in the county outside the city

live in the city school district

live in the county school district

work in the city

work in the county outside the city

### you pay...

both city and county property taxes

only county property taxes

only city school property taxes

only county school property taxes

only city occupational taxes

only county occupational taxes

## Comparisons of Local Tax Burden

Owensboro-Daviess County  
February 2006

### ASSUMPTIONS:

- Married couple earns \$50,000 in combined gross income at age 25 and receive a three percent annual raise through their 40-year working life. Both spouses work in the same area (either city or county).
- The couple buys a \$65,000 house at age 25. At age 40, they buy a \$100,000 house.
- The couple owns two \$20,000 automobiles at age 25. Every 10 years, they replace their cars with vehicles that have an additional value of \$5,000 each.
- Occupational and property tax rates remain at the current level.

*\*Includes city and county occupational, real estate, personal property and school taxes.*

*Does not include health, library, insurance and extension office taxes because those taxes are uniform throughout the city and county regardless of where one lives or works.*



**COUPLE A**  
Couple lives in City & City School District  
*e.g., Waverly Place*  
Couple works in City  
*e.g., BB&T (Downtown), Earthgrains Bakery*

Local Taxes\* (Annual) \$1,818  
Local Taxes\* (Over Work Life) \$112,493



**COUPLE C**  
Couple lives in City & City School District  
*e.g., Allen Street (2500-block)*  
Couple works in County  
*e.g., Premium Allied Tool, Swedish Match*

Local Taxes\* (Annual) \$1,403  
Local Taxes\* (Over Work Life) \$81,201



**COUPLE E**  
Couple lives in County & County School District  
*e.g., Lake Forest Drive*  
Couple works in City  
*e.g., Owensboro Grain, Unilever (Ragu)*

Local Taxes\* (Annual) \$1,360  
Local Taxes\* (Over Work Life) \$87,701



**COUPLE B**  
Couple lives in City & County School District  
*e.g., Royal Drive*  
Couple works in City  
*e.g., Atmos Energy, Kentucky Wesleyan College*

Local Taxes\* (Annual) \$1,649  
Local Taxes\* (Over Work Life) \$103,333



**COUPLE D**  
Couple lives in City & County School District  
*e.g., Spring Bank Drive*  
Couple works in County  
*e.g., Southern Star Pipeline, Texas Roadhouse*

Local Taxes\* (Annual) \$1,234  
Local Taxes\* (Over Work Life) \$72,041



**COUPLE F**  
Couple lives in County & County School District  
*e.g., Bold Forbes (Thoroughbred East)*  
Couple works in County  
*e.g., Kimberly Clark, Eastview Elementary School*

Local Taxes\* (Annual) \$945  
Local Taxes\* (Over Work Life) \$56,410

## DIFFERENCES IN SERVICES

### Service Area



- City government provides services for a geographic area of 19 square miles.
- County government provides services in a 486 square mile area.

### Law Enforcement



- City and county law enforcement departments include different responsibilities.
- The city police department has 110 uniformed officers and 34 clerical staff.
- The county sheriff's department has 21 patrol officers included in its 56 employees. Sheriff department employees also work in dispatch, investigation, court security, tax collection, inmate transportation and other areas.
- At any given time, there are far fewer deputy sheriffs on patrol than city police – and the county officers serve a much larger area.

### Roads



- City government maintains more heavily-traveled roads, curbs, gutters and sidewalks.
- County roads generally are less-traveled, but require more ditch and bridge maintenance.

### Fire



- Fire department resources and response time varies significantly from city to county.
- The city maintains a full-time fire department of 95 employees.
- The county fire department includes 29 paid employees at two stations and 220 volunteers who work through 10 volunteer fire departments.

### Parks and Recreation



- The city parks department operates 20 parks and administers more organized activities than the county system.
- The county operates two parks. (A new county soccer complex is planned off of Highway 54.)

### Streetlights



- The city provides streetlight services.
- When some subdivisions are proposed in the county, developers request an ordinance for a streetlight district. Kenegy installs the lights and recovers its cost on a pro rata basis over a period of years through additional charges on tax bills collected by the sheriff's department.

## IS TAX FAIRNESS A PROBLEM IN OUR COMMUNITY?

YES

### THOSE WHO THINK WE HAVE A PROBLEM MAY SAY...

- The numbers don't lie. (See comparative illustration.) Clearly, there are huge disparities in our local tax system.
- Where one lives and works often has nothing to do with the level of public services received.
- We have two fine public school systems in our community, but why should residents in the city school district pay taxes that are 31 percent higher than the county school taxes? Are city schools 31 percent better?

NO

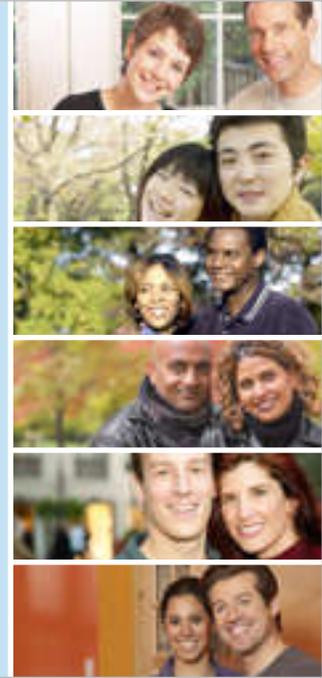
### THOSE WHO THINK WE DO NOT HAVE A PROBLEM MAY SAY...

- County residents should not have to pay the higher taxes paid by city residents just because it cost more to run city government.
- In many areas, county residents don't receive as many services as city residents – and that is fine with them. Many rural residents are not particularly interested in major projects (e.g., riverfront, parks) and institutions (library, RiverPark Center, museums) that are located in the city. It is only appropriate that county residents pay less.
- County school district residents do not have any responsibilities for students who live in other districts and should not be expected to pay more just because the city school taxes are higher.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do we have a problem with excessive tax inequities in our community?
- Are inequities justified because of the various levels of services that are available depending on where one lives? Or do tax disparities seem to be more arbitrary?
- What might be some ways to reduce any disparities that exist in our local system of taxation? In city or county government taxes? In school taxes?
- Do you think that all residents and workers in Daviess County should pay the same tax rate? Do you think that the city and county schools should have the same tax rate?
- Since it is only natural for citizens to resist paying more taxes, how can those who currently pay less ever be expected to agree to a restructured tax system if it means they will pay more?



## FOR MORE INFORMATION/ GET INVOLVED

### Unification Task Force

c/o Misty Sampson  
Green River Area Development District  
3860 U. S. Highway 60 West  
Owensboro, KY 42301  
270/926-4433  
mistysampson@gradd.com

### Alliance for Regional Stewardship

Denver, Colorado  
Contact: Gideon Berger  
gideon\_berger@hotmail.com

### City of Louisville

Mayor Jerry Abramson  
mayor@loukymetro.org

### Kentucky League of Cities

Sylvia Lovely, Executive Director/CEO  
slovely@klc.org

### Kentucky Association of Counties

Bob Arnold, Executive Director/CEO  
bobarnold@kaco.org

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mayor@owensboro.org

### Commissioner Candance Brake

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### Commissioner Charlie Castlen

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castlenca@owensboro.org

### Commissioner Jim Glenn

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glennjh@owensboro.org

### Commissioner Ron Payne

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paynerl@owensboro.org

### City Manager Bob Whitmer

270/687-8558  
whitmerrl@owensboro.org

### Daviess County Fiscal Court

Daviess County Courthouse  
P.O. Box 1716  
Owensboro, Kentucky 42302  
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### County Judge-Executive Reid Haire

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### Commissioner Jim Lambert

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### Commissioner Bruce Kunze

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### Commissioner Mike Riney

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*City of Owensboro Finance Director J. T. Fulkerson and Daviess County Finance Director Tony Sook contributed to this issue brief.*



# RAISING WAGES

## Helping the poor and ramifications of minimum wage mandates

*By Lydia Carrico Johnson*

Tracy Baker would like someday to provide a nice home or apartment for her two daughters, ages eight and four. She'd like to enroll them in music lessons or gymnastics and have enough money to take them to a restaurant occasionally. But she can't afford much on the \$6 hourly wage she makes at a fast-food restaurant in Owensboro. Making more might help, she admits. But even when she made \$7 an hour, making ends meet was difficult.

"I just want to be not struggling," she said. "This life for me doesn't bother me, but I just want them to have their own room."

The Kentucky General Assembly recently considered raising the state's minimum wage from the current \$5.15 to \$6 this year and \$6.50 next year, but some economists say that's not the best way to help low-income families and individuals. Poverty should be attacked from various angles, they say, including higher wages, the federal Earned Income Tax Credit and support services.

"The minimum wage is a controversial policy for two reasons," Robert Stoker, associate professor of political science and public

policy at George Washington University, said in an email interview. "It does not target poor people, because a substantial number of minimum wage workers are secondary earners in relatively affluent families, and it may decrease the number of jobs available to people who can command only the minimum wage."

Stoker is co-author of the book "When Work is Not Enough," (The Brookings Institution, 2006).

### **Who would be affected by an increase in the minimum wage in Kentucky?**

James Ziliak, professor of economics at the University of Kentucky, ran an analysis in February to determine who makes at or below the minimum wage in Kentucky. The largest group is families with both spouses working, one making at or below the minimum wage and the other making more. Such families make up 28 percent of the total.

Ziliak, who is also director of the UK Center for Poverty Research, said states with higher minimum wages do have "slightly" lower poverty rates, but an increase will cause a 1.5 to 4.5 percent reduction in employment.

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**"...states with higher minimum wages do have "slightly" lower poverty rates, but an increase will cause a 1.5 to 4.5 percent reduction in employment."**

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**James Ziliak  
University of Kentucky  
Center for Poverty Research**

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# Raising Wages

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“One has to bear in mind the possible displacement effects of the minimum wage,” he said. “One wants to know who is going to lose those jobs.” Will it be the single mothers and fathers, or the teens?

Another question is whether raising the minimum wage tends to raise wages for everyone, a benefit for employees but a strain on employers.

In an email interview, Brookings Institute labor economist Gary Burtless said that raising the wage may spur a “trickle up” effect for those whose incomes are near the minimum wage. But few who earn much more will be affected, he said.

“If the minimum wage is only raised to \$6.50, this effect will be very small for wage earners currently earning \$8 an hour,” Burtless said. “It will be more noticeable among wage earners receiving \$7 an hour, and possible among a few earning as much as \$7.50 an hour.”

## What’s happening in other states?

As of Jan. 1, 17 states and the District of Columbia had raised the wages and other states were considering it. Employers must pay whichever wage – state or federal – is higher. Results have been mixed.

At \$7.63 an hour, the state of Washington’s minimum wage is the highest in the nation. It was set by a voter initiative in 1998 and is adjusted based on the consumer price index in the Seattle area, according to Don Brunell, president of the Association of Washington Businesses. Proponents for the initiative argued that businesses already were paying top dollar for minimally skilled labor, so passing it would affect few.

Problems have occurred, though, from tying the wage to the more economically robust Seattle area. As wages increase, other costs follow, such as unemployment compensation. Some businesses in more rural areas that cannot support the increases have moved across the state line to Idaho, where the minimum wage is still \$5.15 an hour.

“The economics of Seattle are different from other parts of the state,” Brunell said. “The differences between us and the other parts of the state will get so dramatic, (the legislature) will have to make some changes.”

In Rhode Island, nine of the state’s 14 chambers of commerce, representing 7,300 businesses, are leading an effort to block addi-

tional increases in that state’s minimum wage, which will rise from the current \$6.50 to \$7.10 in March and to \$7.40 in January of next year.

“When that 10 percent pay raise takes place, what about those employees who are not making minimum wage?” asked David Carlin, vice president of government affairs for the Northern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce, which is leading the effort. “They will ask for a 10 percent pay raise.”

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**...the federal minimum wage was last increased nine years ago.**

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## Pros and cons in Kentucky

Those who advocate for raising the minimum wage argue that it would help at least some low-income families with children to improve their financial circumstances, and that it is long overdue -- the federal minimum wage was last increased nine years ago.

Today, a family would have to make at least \$10.33 an hour full time – 40 hours a week for 52 weeks – to afford a two-bedroom, \$537-a-month apartment in Kentucky, according to the report Out of Reach 2005 from the National Low-Income Housing Coalition. On average, Kentucky renters make \$9.54 an hour, the report adds, which is below the recommended wage for the two-bedroom apartment but more than the proposed increase.

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**82 percent of Americans favor an increase in the federal \$5.15 minimum wage**

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“We’d like (the minimum wage) to be more than \$6 or \$6.50, but we need to head in the right direction,” said Ed Monahan, executive director of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, which is pushing for the increase. “We believe that people should have the ability to work for a wage that allows them to have the basic necessities of life.”

A recent Gallup poll says 82 percent of Americans favor an increase in the federal \$5.15 minimum wage; inflation has eroded today’s wage, many argue. To have the same purchasing power as it did in 1968, the federal minimum wage would have to be \$9.05 an hour, according to the Let Justice Roll Campaign, an organization calling for an increase.

Those who question a raise in Kentucky’s minimum wage, on the other hand, say an increase could hurt the people it’s supposed to help.

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**To have the same purchasing power as it did in 1968, the federal minimum wage would have to be \$9.05 an hour...**

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## Let Justice Roll Campaign

An increase “may well benefit a few, but more will see their jobs disappear,” according to Jim Waters, director of policy and communication at the Bluegrass Institute, which he describes as a “free-market think tank.” He cited a report that appeared in the Southern Economic Journal that says teenage employment drops by 5.7 percent with every 10 percent increase in the minimum wage.

The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce opposes the issue as well. Chamber President Dave Adkisson, the former mayor of Owensboro, said many Kentucky businesses already pay more than the current minimum wage anyway, adding that the chamber is “philosophically” opposed to the proposal because it places additional mandates on business.

“If they are forced to raise wages, they will simply have to reduce in some other areas,” Adkisson said.

Ziliak, the UK economist, said wages are best set by what the market demands. If profits are up, then businesses will be forced to raise wages to attract and retain employees.

“If the market demands it, then businesses can afford it,” Ziliak said.

## Is there a better way?

Some economists say the Earned Income Tax Credit is a better way to lift low-income workers from poverty, because it targets families with the greatest needs while at the same time encourages them to work.

By claiming the EITC, low-income families may receive thousands of dollars in the form of a tax refund, enough to save for a down payment on a house or pay for more education to prepare for a higher-wage job.

For instance, families earning at or less than \$35,458 in 2005 can be refunded as much as \$4,300, based on household income and family size. The more people work, the more they earn until they reach an income level that makes them ineligible.

“That feature makes the EITC unique among redistributive programs in the United States,” Stoker said in an email.

EITC is more effective at reducing poverty than any other social program, according to the Brookings Institute, and it can boost local economies.

**Full-time minimum-wage work plus the tax credit would have placed a family of three \$107 above the poverty level in 1975. Today, that same family would be \$1,000 below poverty level.**

**Brookings Institute**

Locally, the Owensboro-Daviess County Asset-Building Coalition last year offered free tax-help sites for low-income families and encouraged them to apply for the EITC. About 200 families did so, claiming \$274,000 in credits. Because families typically spend EITC refunds in their local communities, the coalition estimated that the \$274,000 in credits generated \$390,000 in economic activity (because of an economic multiplier effect).

## Who makes minimum wage?

	Nationwide	Kentucky
Unrelated singles	25%	20%
Families maintained by single women	11%	7.50%
Families maintained by single men	2.50%	4%
Single earner families, defined as husband and wife with only one working and making minimum wage	11%	20%
Dual earners, defined as both husband and wife making minimum wage	1%	1%
Mixed earning families, defined as either the husband or wife makes minimum wage while the other makes more	21%	28%
Youth making minimum wage and living with a family whose members work and make more than minimum wage	22%	17%

*Source: Dr. James Ziliak, professor of economics at the University of Kentucky and director of the UK Center for Poverty Research*

In its 30th year, the federal EITC was implemented during the Nixon era to ensure income to the poorest of Americans and greatly expanded during the Clinton administration. It has grown from \$1.25 billion in 1975 to \$37 billion in 2004. On average, one of every five Kentuckians claims the credit.

States have the option of implementing their own tax credit as well, and 17 have done so, though Kentucky is not among them. States may use federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars for the credit; however, in some states, the credit is used only to reduce the tax burden and does not result in refunds.

But even with the credit, the poorest of poor can still be left in poverty due to the stagnation of the federal minimum wage. Full-time minimum-wage work plus the credit would have placed a family of three \$107 above the poverty level in 1975. Today, that same family would be \$1,000 below poverty level, according to the Brookings Institute

Burtless said raising both may help those who earn the lowest wages and who are trying to support children.

“I do not think I would say the same thing if the minimum wage were as high (relative to the average U.S. wage) as it was back in, say, 1980 or 1970. At that point, improvements in the EITC were much more helpful to low-wage parents.”

One thing is for certain – the debate won’t go away. That’s because there are too many families such as Sherry Durbin’s who are living in poverty on what they earn today.

Durbin already makes \$6.50 an hour as a cashier at McDonald’s in Owensboro and can’t afford to keep meat, eggs, bread and milk in her house. The single mother of a teen has an associate’s degree in accounting but still is unable to find a higher-paying job.

“Owensboro is just shutting its doors to me, like I’m useless,” she said. “I feel degraded and embarrassed.” ■

ment of high school students in college-level courses. Students who do well in these courses can earn college credit and meet high school requirements at the same time.

Owensboro Community and Technical College has about 1,150 students in dual enrollment courses -- slightly more than the number taking remedial classes. Not all of these are academically superior students. Some, in fact, are "at risk" students, who were on the verge of dropping out of high school before they were enrolled in technical courses.

"We are one of 60 colleges in the country that have fully functioning high schools on campus, where high school students can come and go to college and get their two-year degree and their high school diploma at the same time," said Nick Brake. Before agreeing to head the economic development corporation, Brake was dean of institutional effectiveness at the college.

Advanced placement courses are an alternative that some favor over dual enrollment courses. These college-level courses, taught by credentialed high school teachers differ from dual enrollment courses in that students must pass standardized ACT-approved end of course tests.

Demonstrating proficiency on an end of course test prepared by experts who are strangers to both teachers and students, Mauldin says, removes questions of quality control that have sometimes surfaced with dual enrollment courses.

Addington points to dual enrollment courses as a way to crack what educators call the "first generation" problem. "The Coleman report in the mid-sixties said the number one predictor of ... success in college was the education of the mother. So if we could get these kiddoes through college, then hopefully the next generation would ... be far more likely to demand it of their children.

"That's what we're doing with dual enrollments. If we can get them into college while they're still in high school and get a significant number of courses under their belt, then the response is, 'Well gee, I've already got this much, and I did OK, and I can get some financial aid. Why don't I just go ahead and complete my degree?'"

Addington's scenario describes exactly the dynamic that brought Andrew Gates to Kentucky Wesleyan in the fall of 2004 with 30 hours (about one year) of advanced placement college credit. Gates' mother earned an associate degree at Madisonville Community College before he was born. Later she went back to school to earn bachelor's and master's degrees in business management. His father, a farmer who also manages rental real estate, is a licensed plumber and electrician.

Though he chose not to do so, Gates has the option, under Wesleyan's present policy, of applying his advanced placement credit as electives towards his degree. The school is presently reviewing that policy and may soon join the growing number of institutions that allow advanced placement credit to meet some core requirements.

**Broaden the range of stakeholders re-thinking the problem**

Like most others, Shelton feels that Owensboro and Daviess County have made a good beginning. However, he calls for helping more parents understand the skills their children are going to need to succeed in today's workplace. "A lot of people believe now that there is some level of higher education needed now for any type of job a student wants to move toward. If that's true, we as a community have got to ... say that this is the reality. I do not feel the average stakeholder in the community has had those conversations. We may have had leaders in the community who have ... (and) politicians who have, but the average citizen needs to understand why students need that higher education. Then we can expect that higher ed and K-12 educators will work together to make sure those opportunities

are provided."

"I am really, really pleased that there is enough interest among so many different groups and so many different people in this community in making some progress in this. The simple fact ... that it's in our newspaper, that it comes up in conversations in chamber of commerce meetings, citizens' committee (on education) conversations, P-16 alliance discussions. There (are) ... a lot of communities that I could say are not as far along as we are, and they are not as interested in it as we are ... That it's a matter of conversation and is on people's minds is a positive thing." ■

**LAMENTS**

continued from page 4

It's scary business to put this to paper and even scarier to submit it for publication. I can imagine some of the responses I'll get.

"I quit. Just have a little willpower – you can too."

"Take a pill."

"Wear a patch."

"Cooper-Clayton."

"Try hypnosis, it worked for me."

As you may have guessed by now, I've looked into this. I've worried about it, prayed over it, and tried unsuccessfully to quit. The struggle remains mine. The point I want to make is this (but wait, Judy Law, in *Newsweek* a couple of months ago said it for me): I got myself into this mess and, therefore, I accept my status as an addict and a pariah. But I'm also profoundly ticked off.

Let me make a few things clear. I believe that the men who ran the tobacco companies were evil because they lied about poison for profit. I believe that smoking cigarettes can make people sick and even cause death. I believe that kids should never take that first drag and that people who can quit should. Cigarette smoke is noxious in close quarters. It makes sense that smokers are confined to separate quarters in restaurants and bars or herded outside to parking lots and alleys.

That said, I want self-righteous antismoking zealots off my back.

And I would add to that, if we really are to take cigarette smoking and the attendant issues seriously, maybe it is time we considered providing more than a pill, a patch, a lozenge, a film and a hot line to those who want to quit. ■

**From my perspective:** Reader Essays is a new feature offering readers an opportunity to respond to published articles or to generate public dialogue regarding important issues facing our community.

The *Public Life Advocate* reserves the right to edit for clarity and brevity, and to withhold publication based on editorial judgment and relevance. Submissions should be sent to [info@plfo.org](mailto:info@plfo.org) and will become the property of the Public Life Foundation.



# Citizens Speak... LEADERS RESPOND

## Citizens Speak ...

### Forum participants share views about the state budget



On January 24, 57 citizens gathered at Kentucky Wesleyan College in Owensboro and devoted more than two hours to the overarching decision facing state legislators in the 2006 General Assembly: How should our state taxes be used? Participants were presented with an issue brief and a summary of Gov. Ernie Fletcher's budget proposal (prepared by the Public Life Foundation). Through structured small group discussions, they were exposed to diverse points of view. Following the

dialogue, they shared their perspective through a questionnaire.

### A valued cross section

The forum was not designed to attract a scientific sample. It was a public meeting and all were welcomed. Participants were generally better educated and more affluent than average Daviess Countians. Nonetheless, the forum attracted city and rural residents, minorities, business and union leaders, elected officials and civic leaders, nonprofit managers, educators and interested citizens – certainly a valued cross section of our community.

### Better informed citizens

Participants were asked to come to judgment about budget issues and choices after having been briefed extensively and engaged in two structured discussions. This lends more credibility to the exercise than surveys and polls that call for an instant response.

Coming into the forum, only 29 percent of the participants said they were well-informed about state budget issues. Ninety percent reported that they were better informed as a result of the forum.

### A fair and effective format

All but one participant reported that the material was balanced. All participants reported that the material was clear and understandable. All but one reported that the discussion format was effective. All but one recommended the forum to others.

One hundred percent said that it is important for citizens to express their views regarding the state budget.

## POSITIONS ON ISSUES

With regard to options in dealing with state government budget pressures, questionnaire respondents (strongly or somewhat) supported that leaders:

Cut the bureaucracy	58 percent
Increase the cigarette tax	83 percent
Increase taxes on services	50 percent (30 percent were not sure)
Increase taxes on the wealthy	64 percent
Increase corporate net profits taxes	57 percent
Eliminate loopholes and exemptions	67 percent
Not allow expanded gaming	46 percent (30 percent not sure)
Allow the public to vote on gaming	61 percent (24 percent not sure)

Sixty percent of respondents said that state government has a revenue problem; forty percent said that state government has a spending problem.

Ninety-three percent of respondents said that the “no new tax” pledge signed by 50 legislators is an irresponsible action that could result in state government having inadequate resources for vital government services; seven percent said the pledge was a responsible action that sends an important message about excessive taxation.

Sixty-nine percent said that tax modernization should generate additional revenue rather than no new revenue.

### From here

Results were shared with the Daviess County legislative delegation, key leaders in Frankfort, local-state media and opinion leaders.

\* \* \*

### ... Leaders Respond

Local state legislators Joe Bowen and Tommy Thompson responded verbally. Impressed with the issue brief and the forum, they said they would take into consideration the input from citizens who participated in the forum.

Commonwealth of Kentucky  
Office of the Governor

February 13, 2006

“Thank you for contacting my office regarding the public forum held recently to discuss the state budget proposal. I appreciate your taking the time to make me aware of the issue briefs and other information gathered at the meeting.

“As we work to move Kentucky in the right direction, your input is welcome. Please feel free to contact me any time an issue is important to you.”

Ernie Fletcher



# MARCH/APRIL 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.)

## Important Upcoming Public Meetings

### MARCH

- 9 Citizens Health Care Advocates (CHCA)**  
5:30 p.m.  
Program: "Colon Cancer Prevention"  
Speaker: Dr. Michael Scherm  
Green River District Health Department  
Bedford Walker Community Room
- 16 PRIDE of Owensboro-Daviess County**  
5:00 p.m.  
Program: "The Comprehensive Plan"  
Speaker: Gary Noffsinger, Executive Director  
Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission  
Owensboro-Daviess County Tourist Commission  
215 East Second Street
- 20 Daviess County Fiscal Court and Owensboro City Commission**  
6:30 p.m.  
Green River Area Development District  
Final report from Unification Task Force

### APRIL

- 6 Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce**  
Rooster Booster Breakfast  
7:30 a.m.  
Executive Inn  
International Room A
- 13 Citizens Health Care Advocates (CHCA)**  
5:30 p.m.  
Speaker: Jeff Barber, Ph.D.  
OMHS CEO  
Green River District Health Department  
Bedford Walker Community Room
- 22 PRIDE Day**  
8:00 a.m.  
Various locations TBA
- 27 Owensboro Area World Affairs Council (OAWAC)**  
7:00 p.m.  
Guest Speaker: Leonard Pitts, Jr.,  
Syndicated Columnist  
Brescia University  
Taylor Lecture Center

## 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

### 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.  
Daviess 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.  
Daviess County High School Media Center

*continued on pg. 22*

## The TRACKER

DATA OF INTEREST



Compiled by  
Chad M. Gesser

### WHAT IS QUALITY OF LIFE?

- "Quality of Life, Well-Being, and Livability" is generally measured by social indicators such as health, economic indices, and subjective experiences.
- The Centers for Disease Control measures quality of life relative to general physical health, general mental well-being, and activity limitation.
- Quality-adjusted life years, or QALYs, is a measure of the benefit of a medical intervention based on the number of years of life that would be added by the intervention.
- There are over 25 reputable resources measuring the quality of life for children, and 25 separate tools to measure quality of life during terminal and palliative care.
- It is generally accepted that measuring quality of life associated with gender equality, family life, job security, political freedom, social capital, and community life varies according to survey definitions and design.
- The Vanderford-Riley Well-Being Schedule examines per capita full time equivalent hours worked per week, the value of equity in property per person, the ratio of property owners to non-owners, and ratio of self-employment to total employment.
- A country's well-being is often examined using the Gross National Product (GNP). GNP is the total value of final goods and services produced by that country's citizens in a year.
- A country's well-being is often examined using Gross Domestic Product (GDP). GDP is defined as the total value of final goods and services produced within a country's borders in a year, regardless of ownership.
- The Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) examines well-being as a country's economic growth in relation to the improvement of the welfare of the people of that country.
- The Gross National Happiness (GNH) index measures quality of life based on whether material and spiritual development of a society occurs simultaneously.
- The United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) is a comparative measure of well-being examining poverty, literacy, education, life expectancy, childbirth, and other worldwide factors.
- *The Economist* measures quality of life according to nine indices: material well-being, health, political stability and security, family life, community life, climate and geography, job security, political freedom, and gender equality. In 2005 the U.S. ranked 13th behind nine European countries.

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



# 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](mailto:info@plfo.org).

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## Owensboro-Daviess County Asset Building Coalition

Contact: Keith Sanders (685-5707, [keithsanders@omuonline.net](mailto:keithsanders@omuonline.net))

- Attracted 40 IRS trained and certified volunteer tax preparers for low-income individuals
- Assisted 730 low-income individuals (as of Feb. 22) in preparing and filing returns at the coalition's nine free income tax preparation sites.
- Returns have produced more than \$575,000 Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) refunds
- Families assisted by the coalition have saved more than \$60,000 in tax preparation fees (as of Feb. 23)
- Developing financial literacy programs

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## Bring Back Baseball Committee

**Bruce Brubaker, chair**

[bbrubaker@champion-ford.com](mailto:bbrubaker@champion-ford.com)

- City and county governments released feasibility study (partially funded by the BBB Committee)
- Exploring site options with city and county governments
- Awaiting new guidelines on tax increment financing

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## Citizens Committee on Education

**Marianne Smith Edge, co-chair**

[msedge@smithedge.com](mailto:msedge@smithedge.com)

**Forrest Roberts, co-chair**

[robroom@adelphia.net](mailto:robroom@adelphia.net)

- Developing a higher education advocacy group, one of the recommendations included in the strategic community higher education study that was released in September
- Exploring ways in which local colleges and universities can offer more courses and degrees, particularly in deficient areas
- Hiring staff to manage "The Learning Community" program that seeks to instill a higher value of education and lifelong learning into the fabric of community life

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## Citizens Health Care Advocates (CHCA)

**Don Crask, chair**

[don.crask@grdhd.org](mailto:don.crask@grdhd.org)

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

- Sharing information and encouraging citizen action connected with an ordinance under consideration by city government to reduce exposure to second-hand smoke
- Continuing monthly programs on relevant topics and issues
- Tracking "Five Fields of Focus" for 2006:
  - access to health care
  - healthy lifestyles
  - governmental affairs
  - health care costs
  - organizational development
- CHCA now has 115 members and 550 attendees and participants at meetings
- Meetings are broadcast on OCTV

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## Coalition for the Poor

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

c/o Public Life Foundation, 401 Frederica Street, B203, Owensboro, KY 42301 (685-2652)

- Featured Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, on issues and pending state legislation affecting youth and families
- 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

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## Goodfellows Club

**Bruce Kunze, president**

[bkunze1@aol.com](mailto:bkunze1@aol.com)

- Planning annual benefit tennis tournament for June 16-18
- Participating in task force on youth dental needs
- Raised \$110,000 through 2005 "Roll Call" campaign
- Providing more than 1,000 children with winter coats, shoes, clothing and emergency assistance each year

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## Owensboro Area World Affairs Council

**Stephanie Curran, president**

[curranp@bellsouth.net](mailto:curranp@bellsouth.net)

- Presented John Stempel, senior professor and former director of the University of Kentucky Patterson School of Diplomacy
- Presented George Russell, international elections consultant for the U.S. state Department
- Planning April 27 lecture by syndicated columnist Leonard Pitts

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## Owensboro Neighborhood Alliance

**Tracy Marksberry, coordinator**

[marksberrytm@owensboro.org](mailto:marksberrytm@owensboro.org)

- Developing leadership training program through Public Life Foundation partnership
- Strengthening alliances, recruiting members, sharing information, and developing programs to improve neighborhoods
- Preparing action plans

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## PRIDE

**Donna Risley, president**

[drisley@visitowensboro.com](mailto:drisley@visitowensboro.com)

- Will soon release the master plan and cost estimates for 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
- Planning PRIDE Day 2006 - April 22

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## Unity Coalition

**Hervey Howell, president**

[hervey@myway.com](mailto:hervey@myway.com)

- Presented a "Fair Housing" forum on February 16
- Planning programs on single parent struggles, challenges facing minority students, and hunger in Owensboro

## Public AGENDA, cont.

### **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-Daviess 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-Daviess 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.

## 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 knew 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*