

NEWS

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An alternative tax system for Washington that could raise the same amount of money as the current system and provide tax relief for well over half of the state's families has been devised by a group of students at The Evergreen State College.

In a year-end report entitled "Tax Reform in Washington: Why Is It Needed? What are the Obstacles?", the students, all under the direction of Evergreen Faculty Economist Dr. Russell Lidman, found that low income families pay more than nine percent of their incomes in state and local taxes, while upper income families are taxed at about half that rate.

The 60-page report, available through Dr. Lidman's office at Evergreen, finds that the state's tax system is "both inequitable and inadequate".

As Dr. Lidman points out, "tax revenues have failed to keep pace with the demands placed on state and local governments." The most obvious evidence of this, Dr. Lidman says, is the 18 percent decline in state support for education between 1964 and 1974. He says this decline has forced school districts to raise increasingly more monies through special levies. In 1975, for example, school districts depended on special levies for 30 percent of their revenues.

As Bellingham senior Norma Miller explains, "we examined the current structure of Washington's tax system and we've offered possible alternatives to it. We feel the public deserves a complete picture of the issues involved in tax reform."

Miller says the "sales tax on food is the most regressive tax in Washington."
"People have to buy food, and the burden falls most heavily on low income families because

Dick Nichols, Director
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they must spend a larger part of their incomes on food.

"The inadequate tax system," she adds, "necessitates frequent legislative changes in tax rates, forcing legislators to spend valuable time trying to raise more money to fund existing levels of government services." With an adequate tax system, the Evergreen group feels, the legislators could devote more of their time to evaluating current programs and studying emerging problems.

The students' proposed solution to the tax system -- institution of personal and corporate income taxes -- is one they realize will be hard to implement.

"Tax reform efforts in the past have failed miserably despite obvious defects of the current system," Dr. Lidman notes. His group feels the failures are the result of the complex nature of tax proposals, a well financed opposition, and the public's "general distrust of government and fear of change."

"Tax reformers must educate the public and make clear the difference between tax reform and tax increases," he asserts.

The Evergreen students hope to do just that. They have formed the Washington Tax Research Group to conduct public interest research on tax issues. They hope to increase public knowledge and awareness of tax problems, and they plan to work -- on a bipartisan basis -- with legislative, gubernatorial and local candidates in the upcoming elections.