



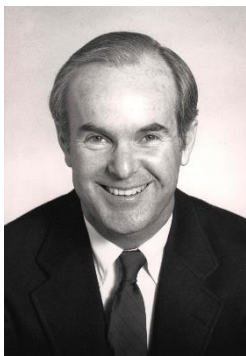
It's not about fairness. It's about more-ness

What that “most regressive in the country” claim really means

One of the hoariest chestnuts in the income-tax debate is the notion that Washington's tax system is unfair. *It isn't.* It's one of the nation's fairest. When tax advocates claim Washington's taxes are “the most regressive in the country,” they aren't telling the whole story.

- **In Washington, everybody pays the same taxes.** Our constitution requires equal taxation for everyone – on all forms of property, including income. Government can't play favorites. Tax advocates want some people to pay more than others, and they want to decide who pays. **Fairness is what they find objectionable.**
- **We don't tax basic necessities.** Washington's tax code does well by the poor. There's no sales tax on food, no direct tax on rent. The state provides medical care and other services for the neediest.
- **Our tax burden is distributed pretty much like every other state.** At every level of income, we're within 1 or 2 percent of the national average. Even if Washington had an income tax, this would not change in any meaningful way.
- **Studies are skewed by political agendas.** The “most regressive” claim comes from a frequently-cited study by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP). Its numbers aren't in question, but its conclusions aim to promote heavy taxes on high earners. ITEP says the fairest states include California, Connecticut, and New Jersey, where soak-the-rich taxes have created **terrible financial problems.**
- **Washington's most-regressive taxes won't be reduced.** What the ITEP figures really show is that our sales tax doesn't burden the poor – it's those “little taxes” nobody wants to talk about. Washington has some of the highest excise taxes in the country – on cigarettes, fuel, cell phones, alcohol and marijuana. These won't change. Our system won't be “fairer.” Many tax advocates also favor measures that would slam the poor with higher fuel and electricity prices. **How's that for fairness?**

This isn't about redistributing the tax burden. It's about making it bigger.



A Lesson from History

In 1989, Democratic Gov. Booth Gardner proposed an income tax, and one of his favorite arguments was that it would raise more money. Gardner said that if his income tax had been enacted 10 years earlier, tax collections would have risen much faster, and the 1989 Legislature would have had \$700 million more to spend. Gardner was right – and critics pointed out the money would come from people's pockets. Income-tax advocates are smarter now, and no longer make this argument.