

Deseret Morning News, Friday, January 13, 2006

## Activists see hope anti-food tax bill will pass

By [Angie Welling](#)  
Deseret Morning News

Encouraged by news of proposed legislation that would completely eliminate the sales tax on unprepared food, a coalition of religious and advocacy organizations have renewed hope the measure will pass in the upcoming legislative session.

"It's simple, it's fair, it's the right thing to do and it's going to happen this year," said Tim Funk of Crossroads Urban Center at a Thursday news conference hosted by Citizens Against the Food Tax.

"Our coalition is growing," Funk said. "It grows stronger each day and we think, ultimately, we will see the full removal of sales tax on food."

Advocates have pushed for the elimination of the food sales tax for years. And with an ongoing surplus of more than \$500 million, the time is right for the measure to pass, speakers said Thursday.

"Boy, have I been saying prayers of thanksgiving and blessings for some of the Republican leadership," said the Rev. Dan Webster of the Utah Episcopal Diocese.

Rep. Merlynn Newbold, R-South Jordan, has announced plans to carry a bill removing all of the state and local sales tax on food. Details of the proposal are being worked out, although it will probably include some increase in the current 1 percent of sales tax money that cities receive, Newbold said Thursday at the Utah Taxpayers Association pre-legislative conference.

Cities would be heavily impacted by the removal of the food tax, especially those that rely on grocery stores for their retail dollars.



Leticia Medina, executive director of Utah Issues, speaks out against Utah's tax on food during a rally at the state Capitol Thursday.

*Laura Seitz, Deseret Morning News*

The proposal has received the support of House Republican leaders, including Speaker Greg Curtis and Majority Whip Steve Urquhart.

The removal of sales tax on food would impact all Utahns, particularly low-income families struggling to make ends meet, advocates said. The effect would be four to five times more for poorer families, because the estimated \$350 annual savings represents a week's income in those cases, said Gina Cornia with Utahns Against Hunger.

The plan, Webster said, helps "a segment of the population that doesn't often get representation on Capitol Hill."

Newbold said Thursday that she prefers spending money on tax cuts that help a majority of Utahns, such as an income tax reduction or the removal of the food tax, as opposed to reducing business taxes.

"Doing both the income tax reduction and removing the sales tax on food would benefit everyone," she said. "Removing tax on business and business inputs would be great, but we shouldn't do it at the expense of the citizens."

Utah ranks fifth in the nation in rates of food insecurity, and those working in and around emergency food pantries have said even the slightest reduction of the cost of food will offer large support to struggling families.

Virginia Walton, a 27-year board member of Crossroads Urban Center, recalled times when a person could afford a gallon of milk but not the extra few cents for sales tax.

"None of us are naive enough to think this will solve all the food problems, but it will remove one more barrier to self-sufficiency," Walton said Thursday.

Many groups have opposed the tax cut, including, most recently, the Salt Lake Area Chamber of Commerce. The chamber spoke out against the removal this week, saying the money should be spent instead on roads, and transit and economic development.

---

*Contributing: Josh Loftin*

*E-mail: [awelling@desnews.com](mailto:awelling@desnews.com)*

---

© 2006 Deseret News Publishing Company