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Rally backs axing sales tax on food

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About 30 people rallied at the Utah Capitol on Thursday to support removing the sales tax from food. Taxing food is "like taxing air," said Laine Gardinier, of the Anti-Hunger Action Committee. "You have to have it, we can't live without it. It's a basic need and everybody will benefit by having [the tax] taken away." Ed Braak, of the Coalition of Religious Communities, said his and other groups oppose a compromise proposal that would allow low-income residents to apply for a \$75-per-person food tax refund on income tax returns. "The really poor people don't even pay taxes," Braak said. "Many of them don't know how to fill out forms. . . . So, there would be a very small percentage that would be able to take advantage of that." Some legislators and business lobbyists favor an elimination of the tax - a \$230 million break to residents - rather than a reduction or partial refund. Jim Olsen, president of the Retail Merchants Association, was a panelist Thursday at the Utah Taxpayers Association's annual taxes and spending conference on Capitol Hill. The grocery trade group would support the complete removal of the food tax if it were done in one year and not phased in under a complicated formula, Olsen said. "As long as we can keep it clean . . . our industry has no problem with that." - *Katie Drake, Tribune correspondent*