

Op Ed Sample: Ghost Written for Erik Markell
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Opting Out of Donor Fatigue -- A Test of Citizenship

From tsunamis to hurricanes to earthquakes, natural and other disasters throughout the world this past year created an unprecedented outpouring of generosity. But as we are asked for more support, a new term has arisen to describe what some are feeling: donor fatigue. Many who contribute to nonprofit activities have to decide who receives help when dollars are limited, or perhaps more importantly, who does not. The answer to this dilemma can be made simple: dig a little deeper, give a little more.

The strength and character of a community largely is defined by the willingness of its people to invest in social cohesion and progress. Without such investments, everyone in the community suffers – especially those living in poverty. Socioeconomic inequality affects communities on multiple levels. There is a greater chance for inequality in the health status of all our citizens when we do not provide continual support for a safety net of services. Investments in the health and human service activities of nonprofits like United Way of King County and its Community Safety Net Fund are imperative to our community's continuing vitality.

Puget Sound Energy has seen our own employees dig deeper this year and give more to support United Ways and other nonprofit agencies throughout the region. Our employees do it because they know that creating a stronger community is not just good for those living and working in our region today, it's good for countless future generations.

Many of us are in the fortunate position to be more generous than ever with our donor dollars. Much of the Puget Sound region is experiencing a strong economic recovery, including

robust growth in jobs, real estate values and personal net worth. We have no state income tax. We enjoy other tax exemptions, both federal and state, from a significant portion of the capital gains realized on sales of certain real estate. And federal estate taxes were greatly reduced to facilitate the tax-free transfer of wealth from one generation to the next.

The federal government gives everyone added incentive to give more through the end of this year through the Katrina Emergency Tax Relief Act, which temporarily suspends giving limits and certain charitable deductions to qualified charities.

The pressing demand in our local communities upon non-governmental health and human service agencies for critical services never ends and neither does the duty of every citizen who can to answer that call for help. Citizenship, a concept we need always to reinvent and define for each generation, is about all of us living up to our obligations as individuals to secure the social fabric upon which our republic and society depend. It is about doing the right thing.

You may never see the face of the child you help get ready for school or know the plight of the chronically homeless person who finds hope through supportive housing, but they are there. Not only will they will be grateful for your help, but your community will thank you as well. A true test of citizenship is rising to the challenge and supporting those in need within our communities now and in the future.

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