

Presidential candidates understating U.S. poverty

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — A U. S. Census statistic placing the number of impoverished Americans at 34.6 million is causing presidential candidates to understate the depth of the problem, says the president of one of the nation's largest anti-poverty organization.

"I think by not suggesting that we have closer to 100 million Americans who live on the edges, on the fringes [of poverty], you don't create the kinds of necessary urgency to spotlight poverty that is needed," says Derrick L. Span, national president of the Washington, D.C.-based Community Action Partnership, a 32-year-old network of 1,000 community action agencies.

"So, the great danger is by saying 30-34 million in a nation of 300 million, that seems relatively low. Thirty-four million people living in poverty in the richest nation in the world is still shameful, but 100 million living around the circle of poverty is absolutely scandalous and I think by not recognizing that and saying that, then we let an opportunity pass to focus on poverty, spotlight it and treat it as the national urgency like we should."

The most recent Census figures on poverty, released last fall, reported that the poverty rate had risen from 32.9 million in 2001 (11.7 percent) to 34.6 million in 2002 (12.1 percent).

Since that report, the candidates have repeatedly cited the 34.6 million figure, Span points out.

Nearly all, if not all, of the presidential candidates have used the statistic in some way. For example, Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.) is quoted on "Ontheissues.org," complaining, "There's been no discussion about 35 million Americans who live in poverty."

Span, former CEO and president of the Urban Leagues in Harrisburg, Pa. and Broome County, N.Y., explains: "Certainly they are giving the numbers that the census is reporting, and so certainly they are not being disingenuous. The census

report gathers up the chronically unemployed and the working poor. But, there is another face of poverty called the future face of poverty. These are the individuals who aren't represented in the Census report. They are the ones who are one or two or three paychecks away from slipping below the American dream, who are one injury away or one sickness away."

Other poverty experts question how poverty is calculated. "The first thing I would do is revise the poverty line. I think it's absurd," says Chester Hartman, research director at the Poverty & Race Research Action Council, a Washington, D.C.-based anti-poverty research group.

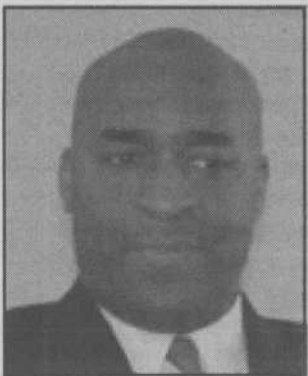
"It doesn't take sufficient account of regional and local variations. One of the more dramatic Census figures is the millions and millions and millions of people who have to spend 60 to 70 percent of their income in order to keep a roof over their heads, otherwise they're going to be homeless.

What does it take to keep a decent roof over your head? That varies enormously... If you live in Toledo, it's one thing. If you live in San Francisco and Washington and Boston and New York, it's another thing. And the poverty lines don't seem to reflect those considerations."

The Census Bureau says a family of four is impoverished if it's living off of \$18,392; a family of three living off of \$14,348 and a family of two living off of \$11,756 and \$9,183 for individuals. Under that calculation, Those stats include 16 million (8 percent) Whites are living in poverty and 8 million Blacks (22.7 percent).

New policies on health care and sick pay are also necessary to enhance the lives of people on the borderline of poverty says, Beth Shulman, author of "The Betrayal of Work," a book that discusses how low-waged jobs fail the poor.

"We need to say, 'Look, corporations, you can't compete on the basis of impoverishing workers. They need to be given paid sick leave so they're not choosing between having a job and forfeiting a day's pay and taking care of a sick child,'" Shulman says. "We need a new contract with working Americans. We have 30 million jobs that pay less than \$8.70 an hour.



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— Derrick L. Span

Texas police shootings of three Blacks probed

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Federal authorities will investigate possible civil rights violations in the shooting deaths of three Blacks in 2002 and 2003 by White law enforcement officers.

The Justice Department's

civil rights division, the FBI and the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Western District of Texas are reviewing the shootings, U.S. Attorney Johnny Sutton said.

Austin police leaders and Travis County Sheriff Margo

Frasier said they will open their files to investigators.

"I'll make everything available that we have," Frasier told the Austin American-Statesman in Wednesday's editions.

Assistant Police Chief

Cathy Ellison said department officials think the federal probe will concur with the findings of an internal investigation that police conducted a fair and unbiased review.

Nelson Linder, president of the Austin branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, welcomed the probe, but said he wants federal authorities to conduct their own interviews and gather information independent of the local review.

The first shooting was on June 11, 2002, when police Officer John Coffey killed Sophia King, a mentally ill woman who lunged at another person with a knife. Federal authorities already are investigating whether Coffey used excessive force.

A year later, Officer Scott Glasgow shot Jesse Lee Owens during a traffic stop in which Glasgow became caught in the door of the car Owens was driving. In July, Travis County Sheriff's Sgt.

(See Shootings, Page 6)



BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY

National Revolutionary Front chief commander Guy Philippe (R) walks around his hotel in Cape Haiti, Haiti on Wednesday. Philippe vowed to walk into the capital of Port Au Prince along with his troops in less than 10 days.

Many of those jobs don't have health benefits, sick leave, time off to be with one's family... We set the rules in our society. And we need to set rules that insure healthy families and insure that we're provided the basics."

Not since the Lyndon B. Johnson administration in the 1960s has there been an all out effort to eradicate poverty in America, recalls Span.

Johnson's "Great Society" was the centerpiece legislation of his domestic agenda for Congress in 1965. It launched an "Economic Opportunity Act," which included his "War on Poverty" legislation.

At the time, Congress passed a string of new programs included a Medicare program that provided health services to the elderly through the 1935 Social Security Act, laws that provided federal aid to elementary and secondary education and the creation the Department of Housing and Urban Development to assist with low-income housing.

But funding for the Vietnam War siphoned off many of the (See Poverty, Page 5)

Jackson, ex-wife in family dispute

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Pop star Michael Jackson and his second wife have agreed to hire a retired judge to handle an unspecified "family law matter," perhaps to change the terms of the custody and visitation agreements of their two children.

In an order filed Friday, a judge approved an agreement reached by Jackson and Deborah Rowe on Jan. 27 to have retired Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Stephen M. Lachs preside over the case.

The matter is believed to concern custody and visitation arrangements for the couple's two children — a boy, 7, and a girl, who is 5 or 6, who reportedly live with Jackson.

Lachs works with a center for alternative dispute resolution that allows parties in civil disputes to hire private judges.

In an interview with ABC's "Good Morning America" on Wednesday, Lachs said the decision would be binding. He did not discuss details of the case.

Attorney Dana Cole, an expert in family law who is not involved in the case, said such a request would not be unusual with Jackson facing trial on child molestation charges.

"They hire private judges so that everything can be done behind closed doors," said Cole.

Rowe and Jackson were married in 1996 in Sydney, Australia, after they announced that Rowe, who worked as a nurse for Jackson's plastic surgeon, was carrying the pop star's child.

The marriage ended in 1999 after Rowe filed for divorce, citing irreconcilable differences.

She gave birth to a son, Prince Michael, 7, and the couple later had a daughter, Paris, who is 5 or 6. Jackson has a third child, Prince Michael II, who is believed to be about 10 months old, but he has not disclosed the identity of that boy's mother.

Jackson had previously been married to Lisa Marie Presley, daughter of Elvis Presley.

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