



Top of the world, ma

Bob Taylor of Umpqua Roofing takes advantage of the sunshine as he helps in the restoration of Friendly Hall. The work is only one of several renovation and construction projects on campus.

Photo by Andre Ranieri

Percentage of U.S. poor rises sharply Poverty claims one in seven in first increase since 1983



WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans below the poverty line rose sharply last year to 33.6 million, the Census Bureau said Thursday. The increase, the first since 1983, left nearly one in seven people in poverty, and experts said the total was still climbing.

One-fifth of the nation's children and one-third of its blacks were considered poor.

Experts said the higher poverty rate would likely mean more people would lose their homes or succumb to health problems and the strain of trying to make ends meet. Some also predicted increased racial and ethnic tension and more crime.

"Since poverty increased significantly from 1989 to 1990 with just a modest deterioration in the economy, it is likely poverty will increase to a greater extent in 1991, when the economy was in worse shape and unemployment rates rose much more," said Bob Greenstein, director of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington research group.

In 1990, a family of four earning \$13,359 or less before taxes was considered poor. That definition does not include any property the family may own or some forms of assistance it may receive.

Some 13.5 percent of Americans lived in poverty in 1990 — nearly one of every seven people. That was an increase of 2.1 million from the year before.

The figures were the first to track poverty in America since the nation fell into recession last year.

Daniel Weinberg, the Census Bureau's head of household economic statistics, said, "I think that using all these indicators, economic well-being seems to be worse than it was."

Presidential spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said the White House is "always disturbed" by the

poverty rate and "there's no denying that poverty rates have increased and the recession has been a major factor." He said the solution is for Congress to approve administration bills that President Bush contends will produce more jobs.

Sociologist Richard Ropers of Southern Utah University, author of several books on poverty, said, "We can expect to see more homeless people on the streets, more street crime, more gang violence, more domestic violence, more family instability, increasing rates of drug addiction and increasing physical and mental health problems."

Ropers said such problems get worse when poverty increases mainly because of the intense stress of not having enough money.

For the 86.5 percent of Americans who aren't poor, the rise in poverty means higher taxes to pay for law enforcement and social services, an atmosphere of heightened racial and ethnic conflict, he said. "These middle-class people in the suburbs, when they go to town to their jobs, they'll have to step around homeless people on the streets."

The Census Bureau's information was based on interviews with about 60,000 American households.

The figures indicated that being black or Hispanic, a child, a city dweller, a Southerner or a member of a family headed by a woman meant a person was more likely to be poor.

Whites, people in their late 40s and 50s, suburban and rural residents, and Northeasterners were least likely to be poor.

Forty percent of the poor were children.

"It is a spiritually poor nation that lets its children be its poorest citizens while so many others enjoy the benefits of the richest society on earth," said Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund.

Blacks had the highest poverty rate of any racial or ethnic group at 32 percent.

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— Marian Wright Edelman

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