

OPINION

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BY ELIJAH CUMMINGS

Americans Living in Poverty Continues to Rise

Washington — Today, U.S. Representative Elijah E. Cummings (D-Md.), Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, issued the following statement on the U.S. Census Bureau's 2003 poverty report.

Today, the U.S. Census Bureau confirmed what many of America's workers already know — many of them are living in

poverty. According to a report released by the U.S. Census Bureau this morning, approximately 36 million Americans were living below the poverty line in 2003 and 45 million Americans were without health insurance. These numbers represent an increase of 1.3 million Americans living in poverty and an increase of 1.4 million Americans who have no health care coverage.

An even closer look at this report reveals that huge segments of our population, particularly minorities and children, continue to fall deeper and deeper in poverty and isolation.

Last year, the poverty rate for African Americans rose by 24 percent bringing the ranks of poverty-stricken African Americans to 9 million. For Hispanic Americans,

even more dramatic. Last year, 12.9 million children were living in conditions equal to that of a destitute third world country.

As we know all too well, the conditions of poverty and the ability to afford health insurance are inexorably linked. In 2003, the number of Hispanic Americans without health insurance rose to 13.2 million, an increase of 1.4 million since 2000. For the same year, 7.3 million African Americans were without health insurance, an increase of almost 600,000 since 2000.

When President Clinton left office in 2000, the number of uninsured Americans

had decreased for the first time in over a decade and the economy benefited from a \$230 billion budget surplus.

Today, after almost four years of President Bush's ineffective trickle-down economic policies, we have record deficits and millions upon millions of Americans are without work, without healthcare and increasingly, without hope.

In order for America to once again have an economy that lifts more of its citizens out of poverty, we must have leadership that prioritizes the prosperity of all Americans. Our nation deserves better and we must do better.

Is there any good news for America's workers in a Bush economy?

the poverty rate climbed by 22 percent in 2003, placing 9 million Hispanic Americans below the poverty line.

For America's children, the rise was

Lifting Voices and Prayers for Peace

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

Celebrating peace when the world is at war, when both Iraqis and Americans still are dying in Iraq, when civil war and genocide threatens thousands in the Sudan and again in the Great Lakes region of central Africa, may seem like an exercise in futility.

But the truth is that it is when the world is at war that we need voices and prayers for peace even more. This year, then, let us celebrate peace on the International Day of Peace, Sept. 21.



Let us celebrate peace in our churches and temples and mosques. Let us light candles for peace. Let us plant peace poles for peace and gardens for peace.

Let us preach sermons about peace. Let us teach our children in faith schools about peace. Let us focus our adult learning on peace. Let us ring church bells at noon that day. Most of all, let us pray, earnestly pray for peace.

Let us celebrate peace in our

schools—from pre-school to high school. Let us sponsor essay contests, poetry and art contests on peace. Let us make sure that every child in every school takes conflict resolution in school. Let us work to end bullying in every school. Let us teach our children to evaluate the music they hear, the movies they see, the video games they play to see what messages of hate and intolerance and violence they promote. Let us help students to identify how they wish to celebrate peace and build peace in their own lives, as well as their community and their world—and then let us listen to them and make their suggestions happen.

Let us celebrate peace in our communities. Let us encourage town hall meetings to talk about peace—in our neighborhoods and in our world. Let drama groups do plays about peace and poets do poetry readings about peace. Let us ask our mayors and city councilpersons to hold International Day of Peace ceremonies and honor those who are peace heroes, just as they honor those who are war heroes.

Let us celebrate peace in our homes. Let families caught up in violence turn to their clergy or physicians or school officials for help. Let every woman and every child experience one day of peace in their homes on Sept. 21—and then let's find ways to ensure that they never again have to endure violence in the place which should offer them the most safety.

Let us celebrate peace in our world. Let every one of us work for an end to war and violence in this world, no matter what political party is in power and who the president is. Let us make sure that every single person we know is registered to vote in this election. Let us write letters to our elected officials about peace.

The United Nations named Sept. 21 as the International Day of Peace in 1981. This year, The World Council of Churches is inviting congregations around the world to pray for peace and to work for peace on this special day.

Bernice Powell Jackson is executive minister for Justice and Witness Ministries for the United Church of Christ.

Leaving the Poor Behind

Income gap widens to engulf middle class

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

In a country in which the rich continue to get richer, it might not come as a surprise that the gap between America's rich and poor has widened. Today's wrecked economy has made this disparity even more pronounced. Wages have stagnated while real costs (health care, housing, tuition, food and gas) have soared. Both presidential candidates have given lip service to the income gap. John Kerry is running on an "ease the middle class squeeze" platform. George W. Bush, in his own words, serves the interest of the wealthy. The reality of the divided America is that too many hard working Americans are struggling...and not making ends meet.

Bush has shifted the overall tax burden from the wealthiest Americans to those in the middle class. This means that those who have the best ability to pay taxes are not doing so. According to the Census Bureau, the bottom twenty percent of the population has experienced a mean household income increase of roughly \$2500. The top 20 percent, on the other hand, have enjoyed a staggering increase of roughly \$61,000. The wealthy have enjoyed 24 times the gain than poor

Americans have.

It does not help the wage gap that the job market is soft, which keeps wages down. Since Bush took



office, more than 2.6 million jobs have disappeared. The million that have been added in their place typically pay less and offer fewer benefits (namely health insurance) than the lost jobs. The truth of the matter is that this is not truly a "middle class" epidemic. Even though the "middle class" is shouldering the bulk of the tax burden, the "middle class" is a quickly disappearing entity. With a quarter of the workforce earning less than

The situation appears bleak. Many of corporate America's gains are going to profits and not job creation.

\$18,800 a year, there is little wonder why the ranks of the working poor have increased. The Census Bureau reports that 63 percent of working poor families has one or more workers in the family unit. Sixty percent of the working poor are white and about 20 percent are foreign born (mostly from Mexico). "Business Week" reports that a majority of the working poor have "high school diplomas and even some college." Thirty years ago a high school diploma and some college would have been a sure shot to the middle class. In 2004, in a Bush-ravaged economy, such qualifications gain entrance into the ranks of the working poor.

The situation appears bleak. Many of corporate America's gains are going to profits and not job creation. Labor unions, once a stalwart of the middle class, have dwindled in size, presence and political power. The real minimum wage is 30 percent less today than it was in 1964. Higher education costs have exploded, severely limiting the ability for lower income families to send their children to college. There are, however, some ways to combat these bleak realities. For example, lifting the minimum wage would boost incomes; shifting the political momentum of foreign labor from low- to high-skilled would help ease the wage competition among those on the bottom. Achieving these changes is frustrated by the fact that among the working poor, survival, not voting, is the priority.

The wage gap in this country goes across all lines. The economy is a rallying point for this year's election. To say that citizens of all races are concerned about their jobs is an understatement. The problem is figuring out how to get from lip service to social service. Talking about the wage gap is helpful. Fixing it is essential.

Judge Greg Mathis is Chairman of the Rainbow PUSH-Excel Board and a National Board Member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

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Stadium Not a Priority

Commissioner says no ball

In response to the unveiling of the ballpark financing plan, Commissioner Francesconi said, "I love baseball, but I don't like this proposal. At a time when so many are out of work, we cannot ask taxpayers to bear the majority risk

for a stadium project.

The city should not be involved in these discussions until a private owner emerges, willing to invest private dollars. At this pivotal moment in Portland's history, the City Council should focus on the most pressing issues: school funding, job growth and taking care of basic city services."

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"Chillaxin' on the MAX"

Dynamix in concert
with DJ O.G. ONE

12:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m.

on the Sabin CDC-TriMet Community Stage, NE Alberta & 22nd Ave.
Free Dynamix CDs and autographs following each performance.

7th Annual Alberta Street Fair

A multicultural neighborhood celebration

Saturday, September 18th

11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

NE Alberta St., from 11th Ave. to 31st Ave.

"Chillaxin' on the MAX" is sponsored by TriMet and Sabin Community Development Corporation and includes a music CD as well as radio and TV public service announcements. This project was designed to provide youth with an opportunity to create a safety campaign for their peers, while learning valuable media industry skills in the process. Many thanks to our project partners: Dynamix, Urban Living Maps, Jai D'Shea Entertainment, Portland Community Media and students, Alberta Wash House and Allied Vaughn.

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