

OPINION



Hunger Increases in America

Need goes beyond the poorest of the poor

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS



Reports that corporations that received federal bailout dollars are doing better, even making a profit, gives many economists a reason to smile. Unfortunately, that corporate cheer isn't trickling down to the average American, many of whom still struggle to make ends meet.

This isn't about paying bills. Rather, many Americans aren't getting their most basic need met: the need for food.

Data released by The U.S. Conference of Mayors shows that the nation's food banks saw a 24-percent increase in visits. And nearly 43 million Americans — a record — were using food stamps this past fall.

The reality of our economy — and the effect it has had our citizens — is sobering. Fifty-six-percent of those seeking help getting food were families, while 19-percent were seniors. Before you think that only the poorest of the poor are struggling with hunger, consider this: Thirty-percent of those in need of help are employed.

We hear elected officials talk more and more about reducing our nation's debt. Unfortunately, many want to reduce it by hurting the poor. They believe that cutting aid to heavily funded government programs — Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare, three programs that support the poor, among them — is the

only way to bring down the nation's debt. While this approach may seem logical, it's not the correct one. And the news from the Conference of Mayors confirms that.

With unemployment holding at nearly 10-percent, more Americans are slipping into poverty. Now, more than ever, the poor needs the government to support the, not reduce the services available. The safety net that is supposed to cradle the needy during difficult times must not only be preserved, it must be extended.

As we enter a New Year, it's time that America gets its priorities in check. Of course, we must continue to strengthen those industries that drive our economy. But, more importantly, we must also hold up those individuals and families that make up the fabric of our nation.

Greg Mathis is a former Michigan District Court judge and current syndicated television show judge.



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