

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Times are tough all over

Are times tough right now for you? They are for many. If you are doing okay right now; have a job, have health insurance, have food to eat and a place to stay, be grateful.

The recently released census report, using the most current data available, shows that from 2008 to 2009 the number of people living in poverty in the United States increased. In 2009, one person in every six was living in poverty, and this applied to non-Hispanic white, black and Hispanic populations. Part of the reason was that income declined for those living in the Midwest or West. Incomes in 2009 were 4.2 percent lower than in 2007, and incomes in both of these years were lower than in 1999. Most age groups under 65 years had income declines, while those over 65 years of age did not suffer declines. Those living in non-metropolitan areas (that's most of our readers) had larger income declines than our more urban neighbors.

The 14.3 percent poverty rate in 2009 was the highest since 1994. But, the number of people living in poverty as of 2009 was 43.6 million, the greatest number since records started being published 51 years ago.

Other troubling numbers include an increase to 50.7 million people without health insurance in 2009. The number in 2008 was 46.3 million, an increase from 15.4 percent to 16.7 percent of the population. Also, for the first time since 1987, the number of people with health insurance decreased, not just the percentage. Only 63.9 percent of the population had health insurance in 2009.

These are troubling numbers. We suspect those numbers did not improve between 2009 and 2010. Some analysts suggest that the numbers would have been even worse without government assistance programs such as extended unemployment benefits, stimulus spending, and Obama's health care reforms.

We have been less than thrilled with many of President Obama's actions, but change may be on the horizon. Obama's new proposal calls for millionaires to pay at least the same tax rate as the majority of Americans. Additional tax revenues, combined with budget cuts, would lower the deficit, and could be used for more job stimulus or other programs, perhaps training or schooling to give more people better opportunities to rise out of poverty. It is now up to Congress.



Out of My Mind . . .

by Noni Andersen



I can never figure out who is more benighted – the politicians who insist that “big government” is “bad,” or the people who believe them.

With his front runner hat carefully positioned atop his head, Texas Governor Rick Perry repeatedly intones the mantra that big government is bad, bad, bad — because it forces people to use things like Social Security and Medicare, instead of living independently in the poor house and dying young, like in the good old days of the 1920s.

Yet, Governor Goodhair, as the late columnist Molly Ivins dubbed him, would not be where he is without big government forcing its way into his life. Like most of us, he attended public schools, from elementary school through college, so most of his education was paid for by local, state, and federal taxpayers. Additionally, as cotton farmers, he and his family have received thousands of dollars in crop subsidies from the pockets of taxpayers.

After college, Perry served a while as an Air Force transport pilot, a truly socialistic, government-paid position. Then he found his true calling — political office — so for more than 27 years, he's been receiving monthly paychecks from Texas taxpayers, plus full health coverage, a bunch of personal aides, a travel allowance, etc., and he will receive a generous pension

from the state. And, while the Texas Governor's mansion undergoes refurbishing, he lives in a rental home at \$10,000 per month, but the rent doesn't come out of his pocket.

This is the man who says he intends to make government “as inconsequential as possible.” I can only conclude that he means in your life, certainly not his.

Perry is only one example of the small government hucksters. While out of work Americans need government spending, the GOP harps on government debt, saying “cut, cut, cut.” They won't mention how we reached this point:

Ronald Reagan started his term with total debt outstanding of \$930 million and increased total debt outstanding to \$2.7 trillion. This is a 13.71% compound annual increase. He never balanced a budget.

Bush I started his term with outstanding debt of \$2.7 trillion and increased total outstanding debt to \$4 trillion. This is a 10.32% compounded annual increase. He never balanced a budget.

Clinton started with total outstanding debt of \$4 trillion and increased total outstanding debt to \$5.6 trillion. This is a 4.2% compounded annual increase. He balanced his last three budgets.

George W. Bush started with \$5.6 trillion total outstanding debt and increased total outstanding debt to \$10 trillion. This is a 9.8 percent annual increase — slightly more than the rate it has grown during Obama's first years. Bush never balanced a budget, even though the economy was in good shape when he took office.

The GOP: Small government hucksters; big government spenders.