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More jobs aren't reducing central Ohio poverty



Keith Kilty, an Ohio State professor emeritus of social work, looks for a grass-roots push for a war on poverty.



BARBARA J. PERENIC | DISPATCH

Roberta Garber, an assistant vice president of the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority, said many people who have jobs "are not making above the poverty level or a livable wage."

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By **Rita Price**

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Census reports, demographic studies and overwhelmed social-service agencies continue to reveal the Columbus metro area as a place where poverty no longer declines along with the unemployment rate.

The question, advocates for the poor asked yesterday during a community summit on poverty, is what to do about that disconnect.

"How do we reconcile this?" said Robert "Bo" Chilton, CEO of Impact Community Action, the summit's sponsor. "How is it that we can have one of the lowest unemployment rates and one of the highest poverty rates?"

More than 200 people gathered at the Columbus Public Health Department to talk about responses to sharp increases in needs such as housing, food, transportation and affordable child care.

Roberta Garber, an assistant vice president at the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority, said employment and poverty lines in many Ohio communities have "crossed" in recent years.

Franklin County's unemployment rate is about 5.9 percent and its poverty rate nearly 18 percent.

"It means that you've got a lot of people working who are not making above the poverty level or a livable wage," said Garber, one of the panelists.

Michelle Heritage, executive director of the Community Shelter Board, said the minimum wage should rise enough to guarantee a basic standard of living.

"If you're working full time in this country, you should not be food insecure, and you should have a decent

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place to live," she said. "That needs to become a core value, and I don't think it is right now."

Heritage and another panelist, Franklin County Job and Family Services Director Anthony Trotman, said an increase in the minimum wage should be accompanied by a review of the income-eligibility limits for programs that working families might still need.

"The benefit cliff is a huge issue," Heritage said. A low-income mother "might lose \$10,000 in child-care benefits on a 50-cent raise."

Gail Lowe, a Columbus Public Health social worker, said the community needs more prevention efforts. She told of a woman "who was evicted because she didn't have \$40 for a water bill. It breaks my heart even now to discuss it."

A nationwide study released last summer that measured intergenerational income mobility found that Columbus is among the least-promising places in the nation for low-income children to climb the financial ladder.

And from 2001 to 2011, according to Census Bureau data, the child-poverty rate in Franklin County jumped from 15 percent to 26.5 percent.

Panelist Keith Kilty, an Ohio State University professor emeritus of social work, said America's social-safety net has been tattered by cuts. Tackling poverty again — 50 years after President Lyndon B. Johnson launched the War on Poverty — will require a grass-roots push, Kilty said.

"It will happen when people finally get frustrated enough that they don't see any other options."

Chilton said the ultimate solution is for families to be able to make it on their earnings. "The best program you can have to fight poverty," he said, "is a well-paying job."

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COMMENTS

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TIM SWENSEN (TIM360)

Republicans cry foul on the efforts to raise the minimum wage. They say that the poor are too "lazy" to work, and that those 54 year olds who were laid off during the economic recession need to try harder to get a job AFTER their unemployment benefits. were cut off. Luckily, the poor and the 54 year olds get a job at minimum wage and are willing to work. Would it hurt the business owners to give them a few pennies more? It might mean the diff between canned beans from Aldis for their kids or a head of fresh lettuce from Kroger once in a while. It must be nice to be John Kasich. He can afford to send HIS daughters to private school and feed them lobster every Friday.

2014-04-03 23:59:53.0

RICHARD STEWART (RSTEWART2@WOH.RR.COM)

As single parent families have increased, so is the loss of economies from two parent households. How much change in the poverty rate can be attributed to two parents not raising the children the can afford?

2014-04-04 07:14:53.0

TAXED ENOUGH (TAXED)

In 1967 the national debt was \$0.326 Trillion. Taking inflation into account the US had \$2.2 trillion dollars worth of debt in 1967. Now it is \$17.503 Trillion. Do you suppose that all the money given to the poor was borrowed? Sure looks like it. Since the 1960s and LBJ's so called War On Poverty, the taxpayers of this country transferred over \$17 Trillion of their hard earned (or borrowed) money to the poor and low income through means tested welfare programs. We have over 80 such programs. All of this was to eliminate poverty. We now have a huge poverty problem and are \$17.5 Trillion in debt. I guess all that transferring didn't work out very well. The liberals want to try it again, maybe it will work better the next time. The cost of all the wars this country has ever been in are a drop in the bucket compared to this giveaway fiasco that relieves people of all responsibility to care for themselves. I know the current financial situation exacerbates the long term problem but that does not change the fact that it is a long term problem about people being

told by the government that they don't have to be responsible for themselves, can have all the kids they want and they can always "qualify" for somebody else's hard earned money through this program or that program. As long as that attitude is supported by government and continues we will have growing debt and a weaker country.

2014-04-04 08:33:10.0

DANA PRICE (HISTORYMAJOR)

@Taxed Enough: Wearing blinders aren't we? True, a lot of money has been thrown at the poverty problem without much payoff. But a lot of people have been helped. Perhaps you missed the trillions of dollars spent on unfunded wars, particularly the last two. Politicians vote to go to war but then they cut taxes at the same time. You can't spend billions of dollars a day fighting wars without paying for it through taxes or borrowing. Our leaders choose to borrow. Oh, and many of those "poor families who don't want to take care of themselves"? Yea, many of them are the very soldiers, sailors and Marines fighting our wars. My cousin was paid so little while he was in the Navy that his family qualified for food stamps. They were fortunate that their health care was taken care of, but by the time he paid for family housing, utility bills, car insurance, etc., his salary was gone and they needed some help buying food. Glad you think the poverty problem is just lazy people unwilling to work (people that I have no sympathy for, by the way). Must be nice living in your fantasy land.

2014-04-04 09:21:37.0

READER READER (READER)

Richard--you have completely overlooked some key points. One is the decline in real dollars of both the minimum wage and wages of hourly workers as a whole. A generation or two ago, one paycheck was intended to support two adults and some children. This is no longer the case. Regarding Taxed Enough, as Dana pointed out, there is also the cost of two unbudgeted wars. WWI and WWII were paid for with bonds and through at-home scrimping and saving. Afghanistan and Iraq were put on the credit card and now the bill has come due. And recall that among the poor are not only the families of active-duty soldiers, but also the returning vets who have returned home to face joblessness and a lack of supportive services. The best way to combat poverty at this point in time is to boost the minimum wage. This puts more spending money into the check of those on the bottom rungs--benefitting them with the ability to purchase goods and services. This in turn boosts the economy.

2014-04-04 10:04:15.0

TONI MCPHEE (TONIMCPHEE)

It looks like all the regular players that deal with poverty in Columbus were present at this summit, but I think many of them need to do some serious self-examination. In fact, we all need some serious self-examination! Many of these big shots in the poverty industrial complex are happy to see things going the way they are going, but would refuse to recognize this fact about themselves. We have the Columbus Public Schools, we have Franklin County Children's Services, we have ADAMH, we have the United Way, we have Columbus Public Health, we have the metropolitan housing authority and the list goes on and on. The executives for these agencies get dressed up in their best blue suits and go to these meetings and engage in what they believe is constructive dialogue. Every year or so they all have their hands out for more money and are full of happy talk about what a great job they do. The truth is none of these people are doing their jobs! The truth is all of the problems these agencies are set up to deal with are getting worse, yet none of the leaders for these agencies ever gets mad about their ineffectiveness, none of them takes a stand or is held accountable. The leaders at the Columbus Public Schools took this approach to it's logical conclusion and decided to lie and cheat to keep their jobs. Many of these people are too entrenched in the current system to even consider that they are part of the problem.

2014-04-04 12:39:36.0

ERIC VENNON (ERICVENNON)

Tim Swensen and Dana Price miss the boat entirely on this article. Republicans cry foul on efforts to raise minimum wage because it will do nothing to address the poverty problem. The only beneficiaries of artificially raising minimum wage are politicians that gain electoral advantages by playing the class warfare game with voters. We know through Labor statistics that less than 4% of the population who live on minimum wage are the famous straw man single parent working full time. The overwhelming majority of minimum wage workers are high school and college students and stay-at-home moms working part time to bring extra income in to the house hold. Almost 65% of those on minimum wage come from households with a average income of \$60k per year. The simple laws of supply and demand tell us that if you raise minimum wage two things will happen. First, it will lower the demand for low skilled labor, and will crowd out low skilled laborers from the job market as higher skilled workers are now willing to take lower skilled jobs because of the increased pay. Republicans oppose politically driving minimum wage increases because they harm the very people who need it the most. The article touches on one of the realities that happens when minimum wage increases are given to low income workers. Studies have shown that there is a dollar for dollar trade off. For every dollar you raise the income of someone below the poverty line, they lose a dollar in means tested benefits. There is absolutely no benefit to the low wage worker to accept a fake minimum wage. We also know that the average time a no skilled worker stays on minimum wage is less than 1 year, because once they learn a skill they begin to make more. It's really simple. The problems that are facing the poor in Central Ohio have nothing to do with the minimum wage. Our problems are rooted in the idea that government has the solution to everyone's problems. It's rooted in the terrible

education coming out of Columbus Public Schools that are putting kids into the workforce without the skills to compete for higher wage jobs. And our problems are rooted in the fact that the City's leadership is more interested in beautifying the visible areas of the city while the residential areas are crumbling. None of the people mentioned in this article have the ability to fix the problems we as a city face because they are the ones who created them. You want to fix the poverty problem in Central Ohio...get rid of the leadership that has driven the city in to the poor house. America has a debt problem, and a poverty problem because we have a massive leadership problem. Far too many career politicians who have made millions and millions of dollars by keeping as many people dependent on government as possible. Change City Council, fire the Mayor, and get rid of every member of the School Board...and we might have a chance to fix this city.

2014-04-04 13:58:32.0

ERIC VENNON (ERICVENNON)

Furthermore, this idea that the answer to everyone's problem is just to throw more of someone else's money at them has been shown time and time again to be flawed. No one likes to hear this, but it's the truth. Poverty largely a choice. It's the result of a series of bad decisions that individuals make. It's the inability to qualify for student loans because of past drug convictions. It's the inability to get a job because of poor credit or because of a poor driving record. It's the inability to develop marketable job skills because one was more interested in running the streets at night instead of studying. It's the inability to pay your bills because of gambling habits or drug habits or shopping addictions. It's the inability to compete in the labor market because one refuses to conform to the dress code of a corporation or take the piercings out of one's face for an interview. Poverty, except for a small minority that are disabled or unable to care for themselves, is a decision to accept what the government gives you to barely make it instead of putting one's self in a position to succeed. Poverty is a choice, and until individuals are willing to put in the effort to succeed, and government stops making poverty comfortable, the leadership that exploits voters to keep their elected jobs will never do any of the things necessary to change it.

2014-04-04 14:08:56.0

RECONCILE RECONCILE (RECONCILE)

Well, Eric, now I've heard it all. Eric says, unequivocally that "poverty is a choice". All these folks who are working full time and receiving below the poverty line wages just aren't trying hard enough. I'm astounded at his words and thinking. Tim on the other hand is right on the mark as is the article.

2014-04-04 16:32:29.0

WILLIAM GRIFFITH (WSG)

Careful Eric you will cause Progressive heads to explode with too much reality based economic analysis of why the promised Progressive utopia NEVER will happen. In the private sector when an idea or product fails the company goes out of business. Fifty years after the War on Poverty and Great Society laws were foisted on the US and MANY TRILLIONS of dollars later conditions are worse or unchanged. Yet the demand from the Left is always for more money. The question is who gets wealthy and powerful from perpetuating / enabling a permanent underclass ?? TIM360 and Dana here is a hint - it is NOT Republicans, Conservatives, Kasich, "the rich" or whomever you seek to blame!

2014-04-04 17:46:28.0

BULL SHOOTER (DISPATCH2012)

Well well Richard aka Rick and H@ll is on here full bore. So Rick would \$20.00 minimum wage satisfy your Liberal whining?

2014-04-04 19:22:09.0

ERIC VENNON (ERICVENNON)

Yes, Reconcile, I did say that poverty is "largely" a choice. In fact, I said it's the result of a series of bad choices. Poverty flourishes in areas where education is considered the goal of sissies, and stress where addiction and irresponsible behavior is the norm. Poverty flourishes in neighborhoods that have the highest concentration of democrat voters. This idea that there is some massive group of educated, adult workers trying to survive on minimum wage is a leftist lie. It's a straw man argument being used to muddy the waters of the debate. Labor statistics show that less than 2% of the population make minimum wage, and only 4% of those 2% are adults trying to raise a family of minimum wage. Perhaps the problem here is that far too many puerile just gobble up the lies that come out of the mouths of our progressive leadership without any real discernment.

2014-04-05 14:21:04.0