

Poverty needs more than government aid

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Lyndon B. Johnson declared a “war on poverty” 50 years ago which continues to this day. Continuing equally as strong is the war on the poor themselves.

Since Johnson’s speech, a number of programs have been initiated by congress in an attempt to reduce the percentage of Americans in poverty including social security, medicare, medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Social Security provides assistance to retirees, medicare and medicaid provide assistance with health care costs, and SNAP (formerly known as food stamps) provides financial assistance to low income people for food.

All of these sounds like great things that are helping those in need. So why is there such an anti-welfare sentiment in the U.S.?

Apparently, it just costs too much money to help those in need. A recent statistic that opponents of these programs like to quote is the [Cato Institute’s findings](#) that the U.S. spends nearly \$1 trillion on federal, state and locally funded welfare. Well gee, when it is put like that, maybe our government is spending too much on these programs.

The truth is that this number is taken completely [out of context](#). When people hear the word “welfare,” many automatically think of someone getting a monthly check that he or she gets to spend on anything they desire.

As it turns out, about \$228 billion of that \$1 trillion is not spent on “handouts.” It is spent on medicaid. Money spent to help sick people who cannot afford healthcare is hardly what I would describe as a handout.

An additional \$75 billion is spent on SNAP. This program provides money that can only be spent on food and not as regular cash. If only those poor people weren’t so darn sick and hungry, then maybe we could trim some fat from our budget and our country could really prosper

All the programs that can be considered welfare actually do a lot of good for those who need it. The majority of the \$1 trillion simply is not straight cash handouts and it is misleading to say so.

The main parts that are given back as cash are tax credits which means that person is already working and not just taking from the government.

The bottom line is that whether someone is conservative or liberal, it is hard to believe that anyone is against helping the poor. We all have the same goal, however we cannot work productively toward a solution unless we are honest about what is or is not relevant to the problem.

This negative attitude towards those earning a low income needs to end. These people are vulnerable and in need of assistance. If we are going to pick on anyone in this country, why not the super rich? They do not struggle to meet any of their basic life necessities. Also, the recklessness of large corporations played a much bigger role in sending this country into the 2008 recession than did government welfare. That may be a very generalized statement, but the point remains that we should be focusing our resentment somewhere other than the lowest tax bracket.

The poorest in our country are not only attacked for receiving too much welfare, but also for wanting to receive a living wage for their work in the form of a minimum wage. The idea of raising our minimum wage to around \$10 has been addressed in national political debates as a means of helping low income earners. This may not be the best or most permanent solution, but it still points to the fact that something in our system needs to change.

Unemployment is at 6.6 percent this month. There will always be some amount of unemployment. There will always be people working at jobs that do not cover all of their expenses. In order to ensure that everyone in our country can at least have their basic necessities, our country needs all these “welfare” programs.

Obamacare ensures that everyone has access to at least minimal health care. SNAP and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) help struggling Americans buy food for themselves and their children; the list goes on.

All of these government programs serve a purpose, and their money is distributed effectively. Again most people in this country are probably not against the idea of helping the poor. Government programs are just one way to do this. Instead of accusing poor people of being lazy or the government of spending superfluously, we must put our rational heads together to solve the common goal of helping our fellow, struggling Americans.