

## Trillions Have Been Wasted On Poverty Programs That Don't Work

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**Entitlement Mentality:** The federal government wants more Americans using food stamps. To what end? Washington has been fighting a war on poverty since 1964 and has gotten nowhere with it.

Unless of course establishing a culture of dependency is the goal. If that's the federal government's real objective, then it's doing a fine job.

Food stamp enrollment, which grew on average by 153,000 a month under George W. Bush, is climbing an average of 403,000 a month under President Obama, and total enrollment as of December was 46.5 million — 65% higher than at any time in the past four decades.

Although nearly 15% of Americans are already on food stamps, Washington still feels a need to pump the numbers. CNN is reporting that "the federal government wants even more people to sign up for the safety-net program."

According to CNN, the Agriculture Department "has been running radio ads for the past four months encouraging those eligible to enroll" and "is spending between \$2.5 million and \$3 million on paid spots."

The thinking in Washington is almost always poor. When it comes to eliminating poverty and giving those at the bottom the boost they need, the thinking is shockingly so.

Consider that almost a half-century ago, President Johnson thought he could eradicate American poverty by declaring a war on it. Despite the effort, the poor stubbornly remain with us. The poverty rate is at 15.1% and climbing, says the Cato Institute's Michael Tanner, while in 1964, when the war started, it was "around 19% and falling rapidly."

Since Johnson's initiative, Tanner says Washington has "spent roughly \$12 trillion fighting poverty, and state and local governments added another \$3 trillion," a total that is close to the size of today's domestic economy. "Yet the poverty rate never fell below 10.5%," says Tanner, "and is now at the highest level in nearly a decade."

Just last year, Washington spent roughly \$668.2 billion on 126 poverty-fighting programs, "an increase of more than \$193 billion since Barack Obama became president," Tanner writes, a sum that "is roughly two and a half times greater than any increase over a similar time frame in U.S. history."

For all the dollars spent, there has been nothing accomplished. An entitlement class has been created and actively broadened. But that's not progress.

What's most maddening is that the war on poverty's failure isn't a fresh revelation. The country knew decades ago that it wouldn't work. A poll taken in 1986 found that the majority of Americans recognized its failure.

The best defense against poverty is a healthy, growing economy that is allowed to flourish without government intervention — and the ultimate removal of programs that destroy the incentives to work and produce. This is a simple truth, but until it's accepted by lawmakers, we'll continue to suffer poverty and an underperforming economy.