



No one's better off on public assistance

By: Claudine Bothell- August 6, 2013

There was misinformation in Greg Hartnett's unsourced letter to the editor on July 28 ("What's wrong with this picture?").

The national average food stamp benefit is \$134 a month, the government provides no one with free phones, and no one who isn't working gets free child care (fns.usda.gov). No one is better off on public assistance than working.

Combining Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and food stamps (SNAP), a family of four may be eligible for \$661 a month or \$7,932 per year. The working poor may be entitled to child care, but they must contribute a co-pay (Pennsylvania Department of Welfare).

Some people who are extremely poor get public housing from the government (one out of five qualify), but most of them live in squalor. The U.S. has a safety net, but it is extremely stingy, bare-bones, even mean-spirited. That may be why so few people quit their jobs and apply for welfare, food stamps, etc. In fact, many people who are eligible for these programs disdain them rather than envy them.

A federal program subsidizes communications providers who give discounts to the poor for landline or cellphone coverage. The provider may then decide to pass a fee on to their customers. The idea of linking the poor to sometimes lifesaving telephone access began in 1984 (Lifeline) under Ronald Reagan, was expanded in 1996 under Bill Clinton and upgraded to include cellphones in 2008 while George W. Bush was still president (Snopes). It is a humane program that continues.

Hartnett's complaint about an "entitlement-wielding government" is misplaced.

The \$24 billion spent per year in aid to the needy amounts to just 1 percent of the federal budget. The amount spent in corporate welfare is almost \$100 billion a year in subsidies to businesses like Wal-Mart that rake in billions in profits (Cato Institute).

One really should check the facts before believing anything about welfare.

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