

## The War on Poverty: It's purpose now political

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By DENNIS MILLER

In his 1964 State of the Union, President Lyndon Johnson announced his War on Poverty. He proclaimed "The program I shall propose will emphasize this cooperative approach to help that one-fifth of all families with income too small to meet their basic needs." With emphasis on his last four words, has the War on Poverty met expectations?

In 2009, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Census Bureau compiled the American Housing Survey for the United States. Here are some of their findings regarding America's "poor households": three out of four poor households have a microwave, air conditioner, and a car; more than half have a VCR, DVD player, cable or satellite TV, video game system and a personal computer. The study further indicated that more than one in three has Internet service, dishwasher, non-portable stereo, big-screen plasma or LCD television, and two or more vehicles.

In September, 2011 the Census Bureau submitted its annual report indicating 46.2 million Americans were "poor." Unfortunately, aside from the hard, cold numbers, this report fails to provide detail about the proverbial "facts on the ground." For example, malnutrition is a word that evokes highly compassionate sentiments. The media tends to introduce this word into their so-called coverage of America's welfare conditions. However, the USDA Nationwide Food Consumption Survey concluded that, while malnutrition still exists, consumption of protein, minerals, and vitamins does not vary among income classes. Findings of the 2009 U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey indicate 95 percent of all households had enough food to eat. Sadly, 3.7 percent of households indicate it's a problem. Here's where government should focus its ample resources to correct this tragedy.

The Cato Institute's April 11, 2012, Policy Analysis declared something that is more than food for thought; it is a call for major reform. It states "... the United States spends nearly \$1 trillion every year to fight poverty. That amounts to \$20,610 for every person in America, or \$61,830 per poor family of three." Look around, it's not working. All this money isn't reducing poverty, it's preserving it.

Americans have a moral and patriotic responsibility to help fellow Americans who are legitimately suffering the effects of poverty. The ultimate goal is to assure that no American goes to bed hungry and lives in safe and clean housing.

Unfortunately, continuous media coverage of extreme living conditions intentionally fails to address the real causes of poverty. Here's what that media refuse to report: more than 75 percent of long-term poverty exists in one-parent homes; also dropping out school, not working full time, and a weak work ethic cause poverty.

For 48 years, the War on Poverty has done very little to address and solve the real-world causes of poverty. It's career suicide for a politician to challenge the poverty status quo. Too many politicians and their cheerleading media have a mindset that cradle-to-grave entitlements are the best methods for spreading wealth and supposedly wipe out poverty. Hence, the inevitable deprecation of America's unique and vibrant middle class. Historically, Washington's strategy for welfare assistance is plain and simple — throw more money at it, take a bow, and don't ask questions. The genesis of government managing welfare is politically motivated; it's all about buying votes.

What will it take to make the War on Poverty really work? Cato Institute's Michael D. Tanner says it well: "More importantly, the real work of fighting poverty must come not from the government, but from the engines of civil society. An enormous amount of evidence and experience shows that private charities are far more effective than government welfare programs. While welfare provides incentives for counterproductive behavior, private charities can use their aid to encourage self-sufficiency, self-improvement, and independence. Private charities can individualize their approaches and target the specific problems that are holding people in poverty. One definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results."

President Johnson's State of the Union challenged: "We have in 1964 a unique opportunity and obligation — to prove the success of our system; to disprove

those cynics and critics at home and abroad who question our purpose and our competence.” Unfortunately, the “purpose” has become political. The “competence” has been a colossal failure.