

Anti-poverty programs help 1 in 6

by [Meteor Blades](#)

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Since the Great Recession began in December 2007, significant percentages of Americans have been added to the already ample roster assisted by anti-poverty programs. Currently, 17 percent of the population gets help from one or more of these. Most such programs wouldn't even exist had it not been for Democratic majorities pushing them through Congress and Democratic Presidents signing them into law. None of them would exist if *today's* Republicans had been around to put up obstacles when the programs were first proposed. If they had their way now, they'd be cutting the remaining guy-wires to the safety net tomorrow.

Just how bad things could have been in the Great Recession if these programs didn't exist was **punctuated** by Richard Wolf in *USAToday* Monday.

- More than 50 million Americans on Medicaid, up 17 percent since the recession began, with costs up 36 percent to \$273 billion
- More than 40 million on food stamps, up 50 percent, with costs up 80 percent to \$70 billion
- More than 10 million on unemployment benefits, down from the peak of 12 million in January, the highest number of record, with costs up from the beginning of the recession from \$43 billion to \$160 billion
- 4.4 million on welfare, up 18 percent, with costs up 24 percent to \$22 billion

Not mentioned by Wolf is the expansion since December 2007 of the National School Lunch Program, which served 30 million children from low-income families with free or reduced priced meals and snacks at a cost of \$9.1 billion the year the recession started and is currently serving 31.5 million at a cost of \$9.8 billion.

Also not mentioned is the oldest and biggest anti-poverty program of all: Social Security. How many people have chosen to take their retirement benefits early as a consequence of the being forced off the job before they planned to do so is unknown. What we do know is if it weren't for Social Security, 19.8 million more Americans, including 1.1 million children, would be poor, according to **the latest** Census data. And that calculation is based on a federal poverty threshold which many critics find too low.

Conservatives fear expanded safety-net programs won't contract after the economy recovers. "They're much harder to unwind in the long term," says Michael Tanner of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

What all these right-wingers, including right-wing libertarians, fear even more is the possible contraction of tax cuts for the rich. Priorities, y'know. Even our very modest safety net for the poor is much too "European" in their eyes. If they get enough of their collaborators into high office, soup kitchens are going to make a bigger **comeback** than they already have.

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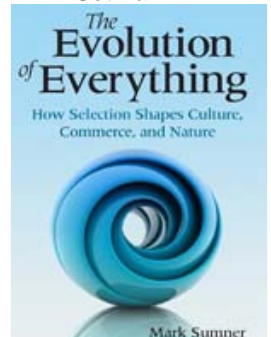
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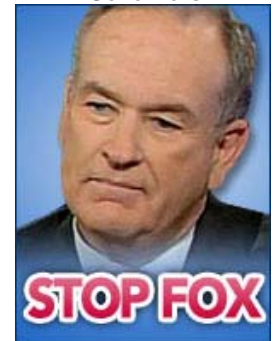
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