



\$22 trillion spent on failed 'War on Poverty' over last five decades

by J. D. Heyes

(NaturalNews) The U.S. has fought a number of wars throughout history and, fortunately for democracy and freedom, America has always prevailed when national survival was on the line.

But a number of other "wars" have not been waged very successfully -- those that deal with political and social issues. The War on Drugs is one of them; more recently, the Obama Administration has launched a "war on inequality," whatever that means.

One of the most unsuccessful policy wars -- and one of the most costly by far -- has been the War on Poverty, launched in the mid-1960s by Democrats and the administration of Lyndon B. Johnson; since its inception, the war on poverty has cost the nation nearly \$22 trillion (with a "t") and has accomplished exactly nothing.

In a piece for The Daily Signal, Heritage Foundation senior research fellow Robert Rector, an expert in social welfare, immigration and poverty, said that the U.S. Census Bureau (USCB) recently released its annual report on poverty -- a noteworthy event this year because it marked the 50th anniversary of LBJ's war on poverty. LBJ laid out his proposal during his 1964 State of the Union Address, in which he proclaimed, "This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America."

\$22 trillion and counting - with no real results

"Liberals claim that the War on Poverty has failed because we didn't spend enough money. Their answer is just to spend more. But the facts show otherwise," wrote Rector, adding:

Since its beginning, U.S. taxpayers have spent \$22 trillion on Johnson's War on Poverty (in constant 2012 dollars). Adjusting for inflation, that's three times more than was spent on all military wars since the American Revolution.

At present, the federal government operates in excess of 80 means-tested welfare programs, he said. Those programs provide low-income persons with direct cash payments, food assistance, housing and medical care (all at taxpayers' expense). Some have called the government's welfare programs the greatest transfer of wealth in world history.

In 2013, Rector notes, federal and state spending on welfare programs amounted to an astounding \$943 billion -- a figure that does not include Social Security, Medicare or Unemployment Insurance.

Since 2008, the number of Americans on one or more social welfare programs has skyrocketed; by 2013, more than 100 million people in the U.S. -- nearly one in three -- received at least \$9,000 in aid from the government.

"If converted into cash," Rector wrote, "current means-tested spending is five times the amount needed to eliminate all poverty in the U.S."

In a June 2012 article in *The New American*, the Cato Institute's Michael Tanner was quoted as writing that, when LBJ and fellow Democrats launched the war on poverty, "the poverty rate in America was around 19 percent and falling rapidly."

Free markets are the cure to poverty

Since then, the poverty rate in America has never gotten "below 10.5 percent and is now at the highest level in nearly a decade" -- 15.1 percent and growing. "Clearly," Tanner wrote, "we have been doing something wrong."

"The vast majority of current programs are focused on making poverty more comfortable -- giving poor people more food, better shelter, health care, and so forth -- rather than giving people the tools that will help them escape poverty," Tanner wrote. "The best way to create wealth is not through government action, but through the power of the free market."

Rector says that, according to the USCB, the current poverty rate in the country is about 14 percent -- or "exactly the same as it was in 1967 a few years after the war on poverty started." He, like Tanner, also pointed out that the data show poverty worsening, not easing.

"How is this possible? How can the taxpayers spend \$22 trillion on welfare while poverty gets worse?" Rector asked. "The answer is it isn't possible. Census counts a family as poor if its income falls below specified thresholds. But in counting family 'income,' Census ignores nearly the entire \$943 billion welfare state."

Rector, again like Tanner, also advocates free enterprise as a cure for chronic poverty.