

OPINION

THE HUTCHINSON NEWS

Editorial Board

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EDITORIAL

Defining poverty

How to define poverty is complex because it is subjective. For many of us, it might mean someone who is homeless. For others, it might extend to the working poor or those who rely on government aid programs. The U.S. government's method for determining poverty is a little too simple, leading to gaps in the social agency networks set up to help those in need.

Given that we use a formula created in 1955, it is reasonable to argue the poverty threshold is outdated. And thus it follows that the method for defining poverty needs to be adjusted to modern-day challenges.

A new formula proposed by the National Academy of Science (NAS) gaining credibility locally and nationally seems a better measure of poverty. It factors in rising medical, transportation and child care costs, while the existing formula figures poverty based on the annual cost of groceries.

We commend our local social agencies for pushing for this change. But should they succeed, we all must be prepared for the poverty rate to spike—a long overdue wake-

up call about the true poverty present in our communities.

The outdated method for determining poverty leaves some people without the help they need. The poverty rate determines which students receive free or reduced-price lunches, for example, and which families qualify for subsidized medical coverage for their children.

Reno County social agency officials say two large groups often fall through the gaps in services: the working poor and people who have unrecognized disabilities.

The good news is that government agencies are beginning to acknowledge shortcomings with the existing formula. For example, last month the Census Bureau published official 2008 poverty figures but included a note that the data was incomplete.

This acknowledgment is the first step, but we must move beyond that toward implementing a more relevant formula that will recognize and address the poverty needs of today by restructuring and reallocating aid more appropriately.

READER OPINIONS FROM HUTCHNEWS.COM

● If it's a government study or formula, you can bet it's misleading. Just like the unemployment rate, which does not count anyone unemployed that is not filing for benefits. They don't want the American people to know how bad it is. ... Meanwhile a quarter- to a half-million people are filing for new unemployment claims every month. Just how have they determined the recession is over? Propaganda! They are using

propaganda to dumb down the public.

● If the government would quit wasting our money, help the businesses that could create jobs within the USA, then the number of people to be at poverty and below would be much less. The needs would lessen because the people could tend to their own needs and not the government, which has created most of them in the first place.

More choice

In an era when many newspapers are cutting their circulation, days of coverage or staffing, Harper County is actually benefiting from the addition of a new source of coverage—and during a recession.

This is a rare opportunity for readers, and Harper County residents should take full advantage of possibly being the best-covered county in Kansas with four weeklies now reporting on the area.

The Harper County Herald began publication late last month. It will compete against both the Harper Advocate and the Attica Independent, but its biggest rival will be the Anthony Republican. The Republican is the largest of the three, with a subscription and individual sales circulation of about 2,100 copies weekly.

With the start-up of The Herald comes more choice for residents. It is unusual for one county to be covered by four weeklies, particularly a county with a population that has fallen below 6,000 residents. There are a number of large cities that have only one primary newspaper serving a much higher number of subscribers. The smaller pool of readers in Harper County also gives residents a much bigger voice.

They can use that voice to get the

best news coverage for their towns. Rather than merely accepting what they're given, they can choose which newspaper best covers their interests. They can support that newspaper and help ensure its success. And they can influence the news coverage that paper provides by making their views known.

Starting a new community newspaper can be a difficult task, even without the competition of three others. The owners of the new paper believe their ability to print in color will help them attract advertisers and that their mission to cover the whole county, rather than just one town, will attract readers.

What ultimately will determine the success or failure of the publication, however, is whether readers decide to support the venture. If readers buy and read The Herald, advertisers will follow.

So, although there is a lot of competition in Harper County, The Herald's success is not really up to those other papers. It's up to readers, who can read and decide for themselves whether they can support another newspaper.

But regardless of how successful The Herald proves to be, it has given readers something invaluable: more choice.

WESTERN FRONT

Items were on target

Two articles in The News caught my attention recently: I certainly agree with Mary Rintoul's editorial in the Nov. 1 News. I would not know Mr. Cotton if I met him on the street, but I cannot believe we are going to make him a better person by spending time in prison. I know others will disagree because they have been hurt, but it would seem there might be another way to pay for this crime. Mary's last paragraph covers it for me. "Prison won't fix what is wrong with Romero Cotton. It will not make him a better person. It will only make him bitter."

The second article: I agree with L.J. Miller about the "Dog running at large within the city limits." I had the same experience. The dog-catcher came into our driveway to pick up our dog, a miniature dachshund, which roamed our yard 10 years without harm to anyone or any other dog.

I believe it is time for editing the Hutchinson dog ordinance. When a dog is being arrested, there should be something to show that dog is a threat or is in a location that is obviously away from home or people. That, in my mind, is running-at-large. Our

dog would simply squat and pee if anyone approached her. Not a threat unless she pees on your shoes.

**ART HENRY
Hutchinson**

Beck is a truth-teller

Glenn Beck of Fox News is a brilliant entertainer who overstates the truth the way truth is supposed to be overstated. The left is wilted by his blistering, hard-hitting persona and they just can't stand it.

With his impromptu style, Mr. Beck makes the toes of the neo-Marxist Obama administration curl like the Wicked Witch of the East in Munchkin Land. The closest thing the left can muster is Keith Olbermann of MSNBC. If he's the best you can do, all hands abandon ship. Um ... is that Barney Frank boarding that life boat?

Remember, if you repeat the truth over and over again, someone will believe it. This is why the Obama administration hates Mr. Beck and Fox News with a passion.

**GREGORY BONTRAGER
Hutchinson**



COLUMNISTS

Buying seniors for \$250

Community columnist



Dan Deming

Having the government send you a monthly check, for life, is a nice feeling I have been getting used to since turning 65 and starting to take Social Security.

Of course, having only recently started my "draw" on federal funds, I am still using my own money, paid in over five decades, and haven't started using someone else's dollars. So if I die tomorrow, I still will have contributed considerably more than I have received in "benefits," while if I live to the ripe old age I hope to, then at some point, I will become a burden on the nearly depleted Social Security fund. That won't cause me to stop cashing checks, but the thought of becoming a leech rather than paying my own way is disturbing.

Which brings me to a dilemma over that \$250 "special payment" that President Obama and most members of Congress are planning to send seniors sometime next year, probably when the 2010 elections are on the immediate horizon. I know there are millions of seniors hurting from the economy and a \$250 check, while small to some of us, would be meaningful and help some avoid choosing between eating properly or keeping warm.

The \$250 "bonus" is being promoted as compensation for 50 million seniors in lieu of a cost-of-living adjustment, which isn't coming next year because inflationary calculations show overall costs having gone down during the past year. That means no COLA for the first time since 1975, when annual adjustments were adopted. Seems reasonable to me that since we are currently in an era of deflation, rather than increasing costs, seniors should be thankful prices generally have been going down, thus understanding that as long as those conditions continue there is no logical reason to raise Social

Security payments.

We certainly didn't protest or reject the previous year's increase of more than 5 percent, which I am told related primarily to the surge in 2008 fuel costs. Now that the cost of living has stabilized, and in some instances dropped, seniors should not expect an increase when automatic adjustment factors don't exist. For some seniors living solely on Social Security, this seems like a bitter pill to swallow and probably is. Those on the lowest end of the financial spectrum are being hit harder than others who are receiving higher payments and have either personal savings or retirement jobs to supplement their government check.

Those are the seniors needing that \$250 "bonus payment," but for millions of others, the payments politicians are expected to approve, in part to bolster their stock with senior voters, are neither justified nor logical. This is especially true in light of the supplemental checks' overall expense of \$14 billion when the Social Security program is only a few years away from bankruptcy and the U.S. Treasury is trillions in debt, leaving a frightful financial future for our children and grandchildren.

I guess it would be too much to expect that distribution of those \$250 checks could be based on actual need, such as judging the person's overall income, rather than a mass mailing to everyone on Social Security, regardless of their cir-

cumstances. Saving a few billion by not giving federal money to those who don't actually need it doesn't seem to get much traction in Washington, D.C. where a wildly expensive and unnecessary total takeover of health care, handing out billions in "stimulus" that has nothing to do with actually creating jobs or improving the economy, a federal bailout of banks and the auto industry, and a seemingly total lack of restraining spending based on costs versus benefits seems to be the standard way of doing business.

The most we can hope for is that some of the unspent "stimulus" will be redirected at paying the \$14 billion tab for those \$250 checks, as opposed to further dipping into the almost depleted Social Security account or adding to the already ridiculous national debt by additional borrowing. If I felt it would do any good and would be used properly, I would send my \$250 check back. But based on the ongoing waste we continue to see in how the federal government both appropriates money and fails to monitor spending, with little regard to costs and competitive bidding, I'll undoubtedly cash and spend the check just like virtually everyone else.

If you sense frustration and anger about how the government has operated under George W. Bush and the "hope and change" we are seeing under President Barack Obama, you are a perceptive reader. My greatest fear is that we are so far down the road with an out-of-control Congress and frighteningly liberal president there is nothing I, or most others, can do to stop a destructive train that already has left the station.

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Racial hope fades despite Obama

In my favorite "Star Trek" episode, Captain James T. Kirk and the crew of the starship Enterprise encountered humanoids from a planet embroiled in war over an issue as clear as black and white. Literally.

The planet Cheron is locked in a race war. This astonishes earthlings. To us, all Cheronians look alike. Their skin is evenly divided, half-black and half-white, down the middle of their faces and bodies.

A perplexed Captain Kirk asks, what is the difference that Cheronians are fighting about? "Isn't it obvious?" says a Cheronian who is white on his left side, "All of his people are white on the RIGHT side."

The episode, like all good fiction, helps us come to grips with painful realities. It first aired in 1969, a time when our country's racial differences were erupting in riots and assassinations. The black-white planet was doomed by its inhabitants' inability to deal even with the slightest diversity. Could we earthlings do better?

Flash forward 40 years. That old Star Trek episode came to mind as I read the latest Gallup Poll on the state of the nation's racial optimism. A year after two-thirds of Americans polled expressed high hopes for a post-racial future, Gallup says, "there is scarcely more hope" for a solution on race than there was before.

If so, I am not surprised. In fact, I am somewhat relieved that we Americans are showing ourselves



Clarence Page

to be optimistic but also realistic. We know one election is not going to solve our racial challenges. We still have hope. We have only raised our standards for how we define our long-sought "solution."

Since 1963, Gallup has been asking Americans whether we think relations between blacks and whites "will always be a problem for the United States, or that a solution will eventually be worked out." The optimistic view that a solution will be worked out surged to an all-time high of 67 percent the day after Obama's election, but a year later only 56 percent express that belief. That's statistically the same as the 55 percent who felt that way back in December 1963, when Gallup first asked the question.

"In short, despite all that has happened in the intervening decades," says Gallup, "there is scarcely more hope now than there was those many years ago that the nation's race-relations situation will be solved."

It was not that long ago that Gallup found our racial optimism at an all-time low of 29 percent. That was in October 1995, shortly after O.J. Simpson's acquittal of double

murder dramatically revealed the nation's racial divide on national television. Seldom has our state of race looked so bleak. Yet, Tiger Woods was becoming a new cultural hero across racial lines, Oprah Winfrey already was, and Colin Powell was seriously being urged by high-powered fans in both parties to run for president. Change was in the air. Hope was being kept alive.

It is a sign of our progress that racism has been driven underground, if not eliminated. But racial suspicions rise to fill the gap. For example, it is hard for me to read about church pastors like the Rev. Wiley Drake of Buena Park, Calif., or Pastor Steven Anderson of Tempe, Ariz.—who have proudly prayed for Obama to die soon—and not wonder how much race might be a motivating factor in their prayers.

But race is such a touchy topic these days that you can be accused of being a racist just for bringing it up. Obama's thoughts on racial profiling led Fox News star Glenn Beck to call the president "a racist" who "hates white culture." When Katie Couric later asked him, "What is 'white culture'?" Beck looked surprised. He accused Couric of trying to "trap" him and refused to answer. That's too bad. I, too, would like to know what he means by "white culture." By understanding my differences with people who come from other cultures, I hope to gain a better understanding of what I have in common with them—even with Glenn Beck.

Doonesbury

