

Republican Themes for Subcommittee Hearing on Measuring Poverty

August 1, 2007

1. This is the fourth W&M hearing this year on poverty issues.

- a. Previous hearings explored the costs of child poverty (January 24), how other countries measure poverty (February 13), and “solutions” to poverty (April 26).
- b. It’s ironic the Subcommittee will officially examine how poverty is measured only after reviewing the costs of poverty and possible “solutions.”

2. Republicans agree reducing poverty is a worthy goal.

- a. Pro-work Republican welfare reforms reduced poverty since 1996, despite the rise in poverty since the 2001 recession and terrorist attacks.
- b. Additional reforms in the *Deficit Reduction Act of 2005* will strengthen work and yield less poverty. But there is still more Congress can do to encourage and support more work and stronger families, which will reduce poverty.

3. We need to better understand who is poor by counting all the anti-poverty benefits provided the poor. That alone would cut the *real* poverty rate in half.

- a. “Official” poverty data is overstated because it ignores billions of dollars in anti-poverty benefits currently paid to low-income families.
- b. If all anti-poverty benefits were counted as income, the *real* poverty rate would drop from 13 percent to 5 percent – less than half its current *official* level.

4. Even if counted accurately, massive government spending won’t solve poverty.

- a. The U.S. spent literally trillions of dollars on welfare, food, health, and housing for the poor since LBJ declared war on poverty in the 1960s.
- b. Yet even if all this spending were counted as income, about 5 percent of Americans would still be poor each year.

5. Further efforts to reduce poverty should focus on what is most needed -- promoting more work and healthy marriages.

- a. Congress should evaluate specific proposals by asking “will this increase work and earnings?” and “will this promote or undermine marriage?”
- b. Proposals that promote benefit collection over work, or family breakup over marriage, threaten more poverty not less.