



# Voices From The Heartland

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## Global Warming—Debate is Heating Up

There has been a great deal of debate in recent months about global warming—whether it exists or does not, whether it is a natural phenomenon or a result of man’s activities. Some argue that global warming is a hoax perpetuated on the American people. Among scientists that agree the Earth is experiencing global warming, some argue global warming is nature’s way, something that has happened in the past and will likely occur again. Others say global warming is occurring faster because of human beings and we can stop it or slow it.

The fact is the vast majority of scientists agree that global warming is real, it's already happening, and it is the result of our activities and not a natural occurrence.<sup>1</sup> The evidence is observable, overwhelming, and undeniable.

Global temperatures have risen more sharply in the past 20 years than at any other time this century. An increase in global temperatures may cause other changes including a rising sea level and changes in the amount and pattern of precipitation. These changes may increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, such as floods, droughts, heat waves, hurricanes, and tornados. Other consequences include higher or lower agricultural yields, loss of ice cover in arctic regions, species extinctions, and increases in the spread of disease.

Positions on whether or not to act to reduce or reverse future warming, and how to deal with the predicted consequences are clouded with discussion of politics and business, as action would be difficult and expensive and cause enormous disruption.

Even though we are not absolutely certain of how more greenhouse gases will affect the Earth, and although the jury may still be out on the biggest causes and effects, we should not sit back and do nothing. Inaction will result in damages to

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agriculture, human health, and ecosystems worldwide, and cost the nation billions of dollars.

On a global scale, the U.S. government must play a leadership role in addressing global warming. On a local level individuals can take action to reduce their personal contribution to global warming:

- Reduce waste by choosing reusable products instead of disposables.
- Recycle paper, plastic, and aluminum cans.
- Add extra insulation to your walls and attic, and install weather stripping or caulk around doors and windows to both reduce home heating costs and amount of energy needed to heat and cool your home.
- Turn down the heat while you are sleeping at night or away during the day.
- Turn off lights, televisions, and computers when they are not in use.
- Turn off the water when you are not using it to conserve this vital natural resource.
- Plant trees to absorb carbon dioxide from the air.
- Consider carpooling or mass transit which will save gasoline and result in the production of fewer emissions.
- Purchase energy efficient appliances and compact fluorescent bulbs.
- Consider purchasing a car with optimal gas mileage, or a fuel-efficient hybrid model to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases produced. ❖

<sup>1</sup> Summary for Policymakers: A Report of Working Group 1 of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. <<http://www.ipcc.ch/pub/spm22-01.pdf>>.

## Welfare reform in Indiana—ten years later

In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996”, radically transforming the nation's welfare system.

The New Deal era entitlement welfare system was inherently flawed and in desperate need of change. In many ways individuals were trapped in a system that destroyed opportunities and hope for themselves and their children, while at the same time costing taxpayers billions of dollars.

Under the new welfare system, states are given federal block grants and the authority to design their own programs with only a few federal mandates, including time limits on cash assistance, and the obligation to more forcefully move recipients into employment.

Ten years after instituting welfare reforms, reports of outcomes are mixed, both for poor families and for state lawmakers coping with changing federal mandates.

For many supporters the goal of welfare reform was simply to reduce federal spending and caseloads. Using these variables alone to measure the success of welfare reform, supporters would argue that welfare reform was a success – both spending on cash assistance and caseloads are down significantly from the 1990s.

Since the changes in welfare, welfare caseloads declined dramatically—58 percent nationwide by 2005. Welfare caseload in Indiana declined by 6.3 percent.

By this time, as many as two million mothers entered the labor force. Earnings for female headed-households increased as welfare payment fell. Child poverty declined every year between 1993 and 2000.

However, the recession of 2001 wiped out nearly half the employment gains, and poverty rates for children rose 10 percent since 2000. In some states—including Indiana—caseloads increased in response to the recession.

Although the welfare rolls dropped significantly, a significant decline in the poverty rate

has not resulted. While most people who left welfare went to work, many took jobs that were low-wage, part-time, or lasted only a few months. The percentage who worked at any time during the year peaked at nearly 79 percent in 1999, but then steadily declined to a low of 59.5 percent in 2003. Many families graduated from the non-working poor to the working poor, and continue to rely on food stamps, Medicaid, and other government assistance.

As indicated in the newest welfare legislation, policymakers in the U.S. have adopted the view that work is the solution to poverty, and the government's role is to promote employment rather than provide income support for poor families.

Policies designed to promote work and self-sufficiency are important for low-income families trying to work their way out of poverty, but work is not always the solution to poverty. Many working families struggle to make ends meet as the cost of food, housing, transportation, childcare, and healthcare skyrocket and incomes stagnate.

Over the last 30 years, the number of jobs that do not pay a living wage has increased dramatically. In the U.S., as many as 25 percent of all jobs pay less than a poverty-level income. Of the more than 35 million persons

classified as living in poverty in 2005, most were children, disabled, or elderly, but 20 percent (7 million) were men and women working at jobs that do not pay a wage they can live on.

Helping working families meet their basic needs requires an approach designed to increase family income (e.g., raising the minimum wage, removing barriers to unionizing, expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit, adopting pay equity policies, and increasing workforce development). Additionally, investing in social "safety net" programs to help families meet basic needs is critical in cases where work does not pay. ❖



## Changing the definition of hunger— tough for many anti-hunger groups to swallow

Late last year, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued its annual report measuring Americans' access to food. They reported that 12 percent of Americans—35 million people—could not put food on the table at least part of last year. Eleven million of them reported going hungry at times.

In years past, the USDA has used the word “hunger” to describe those who can least afford to put food on the table. In this most recent report, it was concluded that “hungry” is “not a scientifically accurate term for the specific phenomenon being measured in the food security survey”, and “[the USDA] does not have a measure of that condition.”

It was argued that because there is no widespread consensus on what the word “hunger” should refer to, that it be scrapped for a phrase that is more easily explained.

A great deal of time and money was spent “to ensure that the measurement methods USDA uses to assess households' access—or lack of access—to adequate food and the language used to describe those conditions are conceptually and operationally sound.”

In November 2006, the USDA determined “very low food security” to be a more scientifically acceptable description for the phenomenon measured in the food security survey.

The USDA now divides Americans into groups with “food security” and those with “food insecurity,” who cannot always afford to keep food on the table. Those with food insecurity are further classified into those who experience “food insecurity without hunger,” meaning people who ate, though sometimes not well, and those who experience “food insecurity with hunger,” for those who sometimes had no food. The last group now forms the category “very low food security,” described as experiencing “multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.” Slightly better off people who aren't always sure where their next meal is coming from are labeled “low food security.”

Hunger would then refer to “a potential consequence of food insecurity that, because of

prolonged, involuntary lack of food, results in discomfort, illness, weakness, or pain that goes beyond the usual uneasy sensation.” Arguably so, the USDA has developed a more a more scientifically accurate term for those who can least afford to put food on the table.

However, anti-hunger groups say the federal government has once again rearranged the language of our nation in such a way as to marginalize the poor. Poor, poverty, hunger, thirst, abuse, and neglect are all useful and descriptive terms that are often scrapped for the sake of political correctness.

Rev. David Beckmann, President of Bread for the World, an anti-hunger group, indicated that the new change in wording “is a huge disservice to the millions of Americans who struggle daily to feed themselves and their families.”

Other anti-hunger groups argue that the federal government has discounted human suffering by objectifying it statistically, and by using words that sugarcoat the truth. Many are outraged that the time and money spent on this issue does nothing to address the real needs of the millions of children and adults that go hungry everyday.

Arguably, the word “hunger” is too ambiguous a concept. Perhaps a more appropriate word for individuals and families who find it difficult to get enough food is “poor”. By definition, the poverty threshold is the dollar costs of the economy food plan for families of a particular size multiplied by a factor of three.

The word “poor” falls into that same category of words as “hunger”...loaded words which have strong emotional overtones or connotations and evoke strongly positive, or negative, reaction.

Avoiding loaded language is a strategy often used to lessen controversy, moral panics, and social and emotional tension, and are also used to ease peoples uncomfortableness about certain issues such as hunger. I would argue that people should feel emotional tension and some uncomfortableness when words such as hunger, poverty, and abuse are used. That is what inspires us to act.❖

## Feed the hungry

Statistics from Indiana show there are over 100,000 people living 125% under poverty in Lake and Porter counties in Northwest Indiana. The Cooperative Extension Service indicates that 34% to 43% of those people are children. According to the 2001 Hunger in America study, 42.8% of the members of households served by the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana are children under the age of 18, and 10% are elderly.

Food Bank of Northwest Indiana works to provide food for hungry people through a network of charities. In addition to soliciting, purchasing, and redistributing food, Food Bank of Northwest Indiana works to increase public awareness of hunger and advocates solutions for the issues involved with hunger. During 2004, Food Bank of Northwest Indiana distributed over 2 million pounds of goods through 90 network charities in Lake and Porter counties, feeding over 225,000 people.

In order to carry out their mission, Food Bank of Northwest Indiana solicits help from individuals and businesses willing to offer financial donations, equipment, food from companies and food drives, and volunteer assistance. For more information, call 219.980.1777.❖

—Cheryl A. Ward was the author of this issue of *Voices*—

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