

More than 1 in 10 Americans live in poverty.

### **BUSH'S HOMELESS POLICIES**

During his campaign for a second term, George W. Bush claimed that it is not the role of government to provide food, shelter, and health care. Instead, he said we are to rely on the Armies of Compassion to come forward and provide those kinds of services.

Government subsidies to offset homelessness have been waning. When the Section 8 program was created in 1976, 400,000 vouchers were provided, allowing families to spend less than 30 percent of their income on rent. By 2003 a mere 34,000 new vouchers were provided to families.

And President Bush plans even more cuts. Bush's 2005 budget would cut \$1.6 billion from the Section 8 voucher program, potentially edging 250,000 households out of the program — 12.5 percent of those currently participating.

### **BUSH AND POVERTY IN AMERICA**

In the United States, 35.8 million people — 12.5 percent of the population — live below the federal poverty line. An estimated 4.3 million people slipped into poverty between 2000 and 2003. Currently, 12.9 million children live in poverty.

For welfare moms, Bush is seeking reauthorization of the 1996 Welfare Reform law, making this law even more hard-edged and punitive by adding new provisions which would no longer count education as a work activity, and increasing the required number of work hours per week to 40. As usual, the "work" of caring for her own children doesn't count in the Bush administration.

In 2006, the Bush administration plans to cut \$177 million from the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition pro-

mothers out of the program.

Does Section 8 funding really help people stay out of homelessness? Six national homeless organizations agree that a study of homeless families who received Section 8 housing assistance in nine cities found that over 85 percent of beneficiaries remained permanently housed 18 months later. Even homeless people with serious mental illnesses, who experience the most complex social and medical circumstances, can succeed.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors reported that in the last year, requests for emergency food assistance increased by an average of 17 percent and requests for emergency shelter assistance have increased by an average of 13 percent in the 25 cities surveyed.

The Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism reports that the root causes of homelessness are unemployment and low-paying jobs, coupled with high housing costs.

The Bush administration would have us believe that personal responsibility is the cause of homelessness. The claim is that homeless people become homeless because they made a bad decision at some point in their life, such as quitting school or quitting a job. But if that's true, then people in the United States steadily have been becoming more and more irresponsible since 1980.

### **RELIGION AND HOMELESSNESS**

President Bush claims that he is guided by his faith in God. What do the major religions teach about taking care of the poor and homeless?

Christianity teaches us that wealth is not what you need to enter heaven. To enter heaven, you must be caring and share your riches with the poor and needy.

Jewish tradition teaches us to "speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor

commands us to "share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless into your house" (Isaiah 58:7).

Islam teaches both charity and the responsibility for caring for one's own family members. One of Allah's blessings and a solution for economic disparity is the institution of Zakaat. Zakaat is a tax on the wealth of a Muslim which is distributed to the poor.

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an: "Take alms out of their wealth, so that thou mayest cleanse them and purify them thereby" (9:103). Thus Islam has made the giving of charity a purification for those with wealth and a means by which the wealthy may achieve nearness to Allah.

### **COST OF CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS**

"Einstein said a sure sign of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and hoping something different will happen," said Philip Mangano, President Bush's point man on homelessness, as he visited the Barbers Point Homeless Veterans Program at Kalaeloa, Hawaii.

In 2002, Bush appointed Mangano as executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, which coordinates the efforts of 20 government agencies. Mangano claims the president has spent more money on homelessness than any president in history.

Mangano reported that there are a disproportionate number of homeless veterans. He noted that one out of every four people who come out of prison has no place to go.

"Studies around the country have shown that it's more expensive to leave chronic homeless people out on the streets than it is to house them and provide the services they need," he said.

Mangano cited a study by the University of California at San Diego in the late 1990s that followed 15 chronic

that time, the subjects had accumulated hundreds of trips to emergency wards in ambulances accompanied by emergency medical technicians in order to spend multiple days in the hospital.

"Factoring in police interventions and periods of incarceration," Mangano said "researchers concluded the 15 homeless people cost the city of San Diego \$3 million. It was \$200,000 per person.

"So what they thought was, 'Wait a minute — we could have placed these people in rented oceanside condos and provided all the services and servants they needed and it would have been less expensive.'

"But what aggravated them the most was, after spending \$3 million in 18 months for 15 people, the homeless people were in the same position as they were at the start."

In 2002, the Bush administration launched an initiative to end chronic homelessness in 10 years. The National Coalition for the Homeless argued about the Bush initiative in a 2003 report: "Perhaps most troubling, is the complete absence of any discussion of poverty and the affordable housing crisis that underlie homelessness for all populations."

### **A PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS**

No plan to end homelessness could be effective without dedicating significant resources towards affordable housing production.

Those compassionate conservatives ought to take a look at the Bringing America Home Act, which was designed to comprehensively address homelessness by addressing the affordable housing crisis, inadequate access to health care, and the lack of livable incomes, while calling on localities to stop passing ordinances that criminalize the homeless. Funding for transitional housing for victims of domestic violence is included in the bill