

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY

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ANOTHER VIEW | PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS

Forget rosy poverty stats

The U.S. Census released figures this week that show that the national poverty rate has decreased for the first time since 2006.

Don't rush to plan a victory parade, though. The percentage of people in poverty has dropped slightly, but the implications are more mathematical than practical: Median household income has remained the same, and the number of those in poverty in 2013 - 45.3 million - is about the same as the year before.

So, our economic well-being as a country is still a troubled story. It's further complicated by the outdated methods for officially measuring poverty, which haven't changed since they were first developed in the 1960s.

Those standards were based primarily on food costs, which were a larger percentage of income. Fifty years later, housing and health costs have risen dramatically. To reflect this, a new Supplemental Poverty Measure was developed to more accurately capture current expenses as well as to account for public assistance received by families.

But therein lies more bad news: Using the SPM bumps up the poverty figure even higher. According to a recent census report, using the supplemental measure increased the number of people in poverty by 2.7 million in 2012.

More important than quantifying the number of people in poverty, though, is figuring out what we do with the information.

U.S. Rep. Paul Ryan of Wisconsin has his ideas.

We tend to be more supportive of remedies outlined by organizations like the Center for American Progress. CAP has outlined 10 solutions to reducing poverty, including increasing the earned income tax credit for childless workers, providing paid sick days, making investments that create jobs and raising the minimum wage.

If the minimum wage in the late 1960s were indexed to inflation, the rate today

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would be \$10.68 an hour, not \$7.25.

In fact, we believe a more effective conversation about the economic well-being of all of us, not just the poor, should focus on wages. The simple fact is that wages have stagnated for more than a decade.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, from 2007 to 2012, wages fell for the entire bottom 70 percent of the wage distribution, despite the fact that productivity grew by nearly 8 percent. Only the top 5 percent of earners saw higher wages. In other words, most of us are working harder, for less money.

How much harder? EPI's "The State of Working America" found that between 1979 and 2007, the average worker saw an annual increase of 181 work hours a year - which translates into 4.5 additional weeks a year.

The recent protests by fast-food workers have tapped into larger frustrations about the state of working America.

Also, people now understand that working people who aren't paid enough to support their families rely on the rest of us in the form of government help like food stamps and Medicaid.

Maybe the best solution for reducing poverty is to understand that if we continue to insist on buying everything as cheaply as possible, we're only going to continue to shortchange ourselves - in more outsourced jobs, grueling hours and low wages.

POLITICS | SEN. TOM O'MARA

A warning against business as usual

In releasing her organization's 2013-2014, two-year review of the State Legislature early last week, Heather Briccetti, the President of the Business Council of New York State, the state's largest business advocacy organization, said, "Our legislative scorecard shows the Legislature made significant progress on issues critical to economic growth, good jobs and strong communities."

The Council was equally quick to point out, however, that despite these successes, there remains unfinished business in key areas like economic development, education and energy policy - and it's a boatload of unfinished business, in my opinion.

The Council's periodic analysis, released just a few days prior to the group's annual conference (a conference that included a local highlight, I might add, when Corning Enterprises President and Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council Co-Chair Tom Tranter was elected Chairman of the Business Council's Board of Directors) has long stood as a primary benchmark for New York's business community in its assessment of state government actions. So, according to the latest Business Council scorecard, where do things stand?

It's worth stressing, I think, that the Business Council issued an urgent warning: the enactment of any future legislation imposing "new costs and new restrictions" on private-sector job creators would quickly turn back



TOM O'MARA

the clock on progress we've made since 2011 to improve the state's economic competitiveness.

It's that warning which perfectly frames what's at stake in the upcoming November elections, the outcome of which will largely determine the direction of the new legislative session in 2015.

Nobody's hiding from the fact that there's an aggressive political drive underway across this state, a drive fueled in large part by far-left New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and his allies, to ensure a full Democratic takeover of state government in 2015. The de Blasio camp believes that controlling the Governor's office, and both the state Senate and Assembly, will clear the way for enacting a fiscal and a social agenda (higher taxes, higher state spending, a massive minimum wage increase that will destroy many small businesses, more gun control, taxpayer-funded college education for illegal aliens, and on and on) that I argue is about as far away as you can get from any real concern about Upstate jobs and the Upstate economy. For the record, the Business Council makes no bones about its opposition to a Democratic takeover of the Senate.

The pitfalls of one-party control of New York government should deeply concern all of us, especially Upstate. It's troubling on many levels, but last week the Business Council helped pinpoint the major reasons why.

On the conference's opening day, for example, I was invited to participate in a legislative panel kicking off the week's discussions by focusing on what awaits the Legislature in 2015. Not surprisingly, our talk focused on the economy and jobs. It's a discussion which falls directly in step with the Business Council's latest scorecard, which examined the voting record of every state legislator on 38 specific pieces of legislation the Legislature considered over the past two years that the Business Council believes demonstrates a commitment to tax reform, state spending restraint and economic competitiveness. The 2013-14 Legislative Scorecard is currently posted on the Business Council's website, www.bcnys.org.

"Controlling taxes by limiting spending, promoting economic growth to create more jobs and improving educational outcomes in the State are The Business Council's priorities, and our legislative scorecard shows New Yorkers which legislators support those priorities," Business Council President Briccetti said. And while I certainly welcome their recognition of my commitment to bipartisan actions aimed at rebuilding and revitalizing the New York State economy, it's more important, as I noted

earlier, to stress that the Business Council makes it clear that there's plenty of work left to do to get this state turned around and, again, calls for safeguarding against any return to the failed, tax-and-spend policies of the past.

When all's said and done, the Business Council sounded an important alarm last week. Despite the efforts of the past several years to move New York State to a better and stronger economic place, New Yorkers generally - and Upstate communities for certain - aren't feeling it. A recent Siena Research Institute survey, for instance, found that nearly half of Upstate voters answered "wrong direction" in response to the following question, "Is New York State on the right track, or is it headed in the wrong direction?"

There's no magic wand that state government can wave to produce a full economic recovery. But there's a solid belief - one that I adhere to in fundamental ways - that government policies can help create a business climate that puts people to work. That's the priority. It has to remain the priority. We can't risk it being undermined by a different legislative agenda that moves the focus of New York government in an entirely opposite direction.

State Sen. Tom O'Mara, R-Big Flats, represents New York's 58th Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler and Yates counties, and part of Tompkins County.

ANOTHER VIEW



First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

C-PP: An accident waiting to happen

TO THE EDITOR | Our youth in the Corning/Painted Post school district deserve safe passage to school in the morning. An enlightened city shouldn't wait for accidents to occur as a result of the traffic congestion and minor chaos occurring by our high school. Over the school mornings to date, I've witnessed drivers and students trying all sorts of drop-off approaches, including dropping students off in areas where they must duck traffic to make their way to school. Other drivers are darting from side streets (or the school entrance) to join the lines entering or leaving Corning Boulevard. We need to take

immediate steps to improve safety before the studies about traffic get completed. I urge the city of Corning to assign a police officer to stand at the drop-off entrance of C-PP High School and actively direct traffic. Let's not wait for accidents to occur before taking this action.

- Mark Soulliere, Corning

End pharmacy tobacco sales

TO THE EDITOR | On September 2, 2014, CVS stopped selling tobacco in its nearly 500 stores in New York State, and we are calling on our community to help end tobacco sales at all local and chain pharmacies.

Since CVS's announcement in February to end the sale of tobacco

products in its stores, there has been an overwhelming show of support for all pharmacies to end tobacco sales.

Restricting the sale of tobacco in pharmacies helps reduce the consumption, availability, visibility and social acceptability of tobacco use in our local communities.

In addition, smokers have more success quitting when they use cessation aids such as "the patch" or often found side-by-side with tobacco products in a chain pharmacy and research has shown that the visual display of tobacco products stimulates physical cravings and frustrates efforts to quit.

The United States is the only country in the world where tobacco products

can be found for sale in a pharmacy. As the role of pharmacies in the U.S. becomes more integral to the delivery of health care, the sale of tobacco in these facilities becomes a greater conflict of interest. Pharmacies cannot completely assume the role of "public health facilities" while encouraging the use of tobacco, the deadliest product sold in the U.S. and a product responsible for the deaths of 23,600 New Yorkers Now is the time to finish this practice.

For more information or to help end pharmacy tobacco sales in your community, contact the Southern Tier Tobacco Awareness Coalition (STTAC) at 737-2858 or visit www.sttac.org.

- Stacey O'Dell, prevention educator, Steuben Council on Addictions

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