

Republican Perspective

by Ed Manning

The Endless War

"In dealing with poverty, welfare and foreign aid are a Band-Aid. Free enterprise is the cure."

Bono (Irish rock star)

A war has been going on for over 50 years without any protests from the Left. You might believe that the silence is due to imminent victory. Au contraire, this is a war that the Left fervently embraces because the battles make you feel good. Forget that after 50 years of fighting you have gained little ground. Forget that taxpayers have forked over \$22 trillion, three times more than was spent on all military wars since the American Revolution.

The War on Poverty celebrated its 50th anniversary in September 2014. The Census Bureau reported that 14.5% of Americans, a full 45 million lived below the poverty line in 2013. This percentage is almost the same as it was in 1967 after a few years of the start of the war. How can we spend \$22 trillion on welfare with virtually no impact on improving the poverty rate?

The Progressives answer is we need to spend more. If spending more is the cure, why does President Obama say these programs are working? The federal government has more than 80 means-tested welfare programs. Obama's presidency is distinguished with the amount of spending on social welfare. One-third of the U.S. population received aid from at least one welfare program at an average cost of \$9,000 per recipient in 2013. Under Obama there has been a sharp increase in the amount of citizens on food stamps and Social Security Disability. I know, I know - it was George Bush's fault.

President Lyndon B. Johnson initiated the war. His stated purpose is worth repeating: "We want to give the forgotten one-fifth of our people opportunity not doles." The War on Poverty will strike "at the causes, not just the consequences of poverty." He added "our aim is not only to relieve the symptom of poverty, but to cure it and, above all, to prevent it."

The War on Poverty was suppose to help the poor become self-sufficient but instead it has made them dependent and dysfunctional. When the war started, 7% of U.S. kids were born out of wedlock. Today, the number is 40%. As the welfare state grew, single-parent families dramatically increased while traditional marriage stagnated. The welfare system penalized low-income married couples by eliminating or substantially

reducing their benefits while increasing benefits to single mothers. The law of unintended consequences struck again.

The unplanned effect of the federal government's anti-poverty programs is the growth of an ethic of government dependency. Historian Allen Matusow, Rice University, reported there is no evidence that Medicaid provided easier access to health care for the poor or better quality than previous charity care. He states that Medicare has not significantly increased the life spans of the elderly. He believes the main economic effect of these programs was to transfer income from the middle class taxpayers to middle class health professionals and create new inequalities among the states and among the welfare and non-welfare poor.

The War on Poverty has failed colossally to achieve President Johnson's goal of promoting self-sufficiency. The Left now tells the poor that they are "victims" of racism, sexism and capitalism. They are told they have a "right" to have others provide food, housing and medical care. The middle class worker understands that providing for oneself and family is not a "right" but are "responsibilities" of adult citizens.

Republicans believe we should restructure the welfare state toward increasing self-sufficiency. Able bodied recipients of cash, food, housing and medical care should be required to work or prepare for work as a condition of receiving aid. It's an appropriate time to re-engineer the government's anti-poverty effort. It is time to stop spending taxpayer dollars on failed programs. After 50 years, this war needs to end.