

Government misdefining 'poverty'

By KEN LEONARD

The poverty figures have come out, and as usual they present a dim picture of American society.

Despite years of programs meant to improve the equity of society, there is the dreaded report that poverty has increased. Naturally, this has been blamed on the Reagan and Bush policies. By "cutting" entitlement spending, they purportedly have caused this problem. Actually, the Census Bureau caused it.

In fact, the Census Bureau has the almost-magical ability to create poverty among those who are not impoverished. They have a special and wondrous formula for doing so.

First, you must base your poverty figure on the annual income of the family in question. Only count their current income, not what they have saved, what they own, or any other assets they might have available.

Then, be sure to ignore any government spending on the fami-

lies. If a family receives all of its income from the various welfare agencies, even if this adds up to an above-average family, then the recorded sum is nothing!

Next, report that all incomes below half of the median income level are those in poverty. Be absolutely certain that you carefully avoid figuring in the cost of living in areas. If this figure is allowed to influence the report, then you might lose some of your precious "poverty"-stricken families.

Finally, release the report to the press without explaining it in full. A nice little press conference will do the job quite well. The reporters don't want to be bothered with details like factual accuracy, and the cause here is such a friendly one that no one would actually challenge your numbers. As long as you claim that poverty has increased, you are on the politically correct side and can't lose with the major media moguls.

This is the method that the Bureau is forced to use in determining the poverty rate. It is actually possible to be in poverty while having a bank account with more than \$100,000. Most people would call that rich, but it's close enough for government work.

For example, the Bureau ignores the entirety of the spending on food stamps, Medicaid, and public housing, and declares that these have no impact on living conditions. In all, the government spends almost \$200 billion on social programs each year. The Census counts less than \$40 billion as income.

To interject some semblance of reality to these discussions, I could point out that in 1989, 40 percent of those listed as poor by the Bureau owned their own homes. These weren't little shacks, either. The average home owned by the poor is a three-bed-

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room home with a garage and either a porch or a patio.

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, more than one million of the "poor" own homes valued at more than \$80,000. About 75,000 of these impoverished souls own homes valued at more than \$300,000.

Only eight percent of the poor live in homes that are overcrowded, and in fact more than half of them live in homes with a

rooms-to-occupants ratio of better than two to one. The average poor person, according to the Heritage Foundation, has twice as much living space than the average Japanese middle class person. Nutritional intake is identical to that of middle class figures for children raised in poverty, according to the Agriculture Department.

The "explosion in poverty" is easily orchestrated by adjusting the figures used to calculate poverty. This is exactly what the government has succeeded in doing. Many of the above facts were not cited, because their source proves the intent of the Census Bureau's officials. The source of this in-

formation, which confirms that poverty is not the overriding crisis which some politicians claim, is the Census Bureau.

There are real poor in the United States, and some of them can even be helped. Deceit does not help them. An accurate count might help those who want to do something about the problem. In any case, it would replace hysterical allegations that 10 percent of the nation live in poverty with real facts. Compassion and concern should not replace honesty in forming sound policy. Politically correct reports may help when it's time to throw political dirt, but they do nothing for anyone in need.

Poet's skill with words impressive

By CECILIA CASEY

The second reading of the North Carolina Wesleyan College's Visiting Writers Series started off with a tribute to Dr. Leverett T. Smith, who has made the series possible for many years.

N.C. Wesleyan President, Dr. Leslie H. Garner, presented a gift to Dr. Smith to show the college's appreciation of his work and devotion to the Visiting Writers Series. Smith was given an editor's desk and ringing applause from the audience.

"I don't know how to say thank you, so I'll just say thank you," Smith responded. Dr. Chris LaLonde, who has taken over management of the series, then went on to introduce poet Robert Dana.

Dana read "Horses," "Starting Out For the Difficult World," "Blue Run," "Watching the Night Hark Dive," "Post Cards From Tanzania," and other poems from his book, *Yes Everything*.

However, the highlight of Dana's reading did not come from

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his published works. His most impressive poem was one he had written only hours before the reading because the poem showed Dana's ability to record his world in long, slow, and careful words.

LaLonde and Dana were having lunch and LaLonde asked whether Dana could write anywhere. Dana replied, "I didn't used to be able to, but I can now." The poem is entitled "In Acid Park North Carolina" and was dedicated to Valas and LaLonde:

"In the adjacent rooms of my

motel/ their minds spinning rainbow colored as/ Valas Simpson's windmills in Acid Park./ where in the hours between midnight and dawn/ teenagers come with their drugs and beer./ vandals to a shrine to break, to pry loose,/ the bright blue gaze, to carry away./ wheels and bells, not so much to kill,/ as to connect to those voices raging in the winds of sleep."

Robert Dana retired from teaching journalism and literature in the midwest and Cornell College after having done so for 30 years.

"I'm going to retire into my real life, writing, traveling, writing a few essays, and mostly writing poems," he said.

Censorship can't resolve world's woes

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work" as verbs. The word "facilitator." The word "healthy" when it means "healthful." I don't care whether or not my food works out; I want to know whether or not it has any food value.

Cars that talk to me. Cars that cost more than my house.

People who are cheerful in the mornings. Those morning radio talk shows in which two cheerful, screaming voices tell me the end of an off-color joke and then invite the audience to call in for the answer. The people who call in for the answer.

Any additional TV networks or stations. Re-runs of *Gilligan's Island* and *The Brandy Bunch*. Football games which preempt the evening news. That weather guy on WRAL.

Those prints of sailboats or country scenes in motels.

Ironing.

Elvis impersonators (but let's keep the Elvis sightings).

Well, I could go on and on, but this would do for my first hundred days. I promise if you elect me Censorship Czar, I will make you just like me. Think about it.

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