

Media Ignores Success of Food Stamps

Written by George E. Curry
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The Department of Agriculture recently issued a report showing that food stamps, one of the nation's largest safety net programs, is also one of the most effective. Food stamps were responsible for reducing the prevalence of poverty by an annual average of 4.4 percent from 2000 to 2009, according to the report, *Alleviating Poverty in the United States: The Critical Role of SNAP Benefits*.

SNAP, an acronym for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, was formerly called the Food Stamps Program.

According to the study, SNAP's antipoverty effect was strongest in 2009 when benefits were increased under President Obama's stimulus package, also known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. That year, SNAP benefits reduced the poverty rate by nearly 8 percent and the depth of child poverty by 20.9 percent.

That's startling news. It's also news you may have easily missed.

Media Matters, the watchdog group, reported that a week after the release of the study on April 9, no broadcast TV outlet had mentioned the study. And only one cable news network – Al Sharpton's "Politics Nation" on MSNBC – mentioned the report.

"New evidence that food stamps help to drastically reduce poverty has been largely ignored by

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the media, even as the right pursues a campaign to bully those who face food insecurity into silence and help conservatives slash funding for successful antipoverty measures,” Media Matters stated.

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich has tried to demean President Obama by repeatedly labeling him “the most successful food stamp president in American history.” Gingrich continued to make that charge even after a couple of fact-checking sites pointed out that more people received food stamps under President George W. Bush than President Obama.

As Media Matters noted, “In fact, the U.S. Department of Agriculture began taking steps to ‘ensure that all eligible people, particularly seniors, legal immigrants and the working poor, are aware and have access to the benefits they need and deserve’ long before Obama took office.”

The attacks on food stamps recipients extend beyond politics. Some of it has been nasty and deeply personal.

Charles Payne, appearing in a Fox News business segment, acknowledged that anti-poverty programs, food stamps and unemployment insurance were “good programs” and then promptly proceeded to viciously attack recipients of those programs.

“I think the real narrative here, though, is that people aren’t embarrassed by it,” Payne said. “People aren’t ashamed by it. In other words, there was a time when people were embarrassed to be on food stamps; there was a time when people were embarrassed to be on unemployment for six months, let alone demanding to be on for more than two years...”

That’s an insult to more than 46 million people who are on food stamps because they desperately need them. Approximately 85 percent of SNAP households have gross incomes below the poverty line, defined as \$22,000 for a family of four. And the benefits average only id="mce_marker".50 per meal, a figure scheduled to drop to id="mce_marker".30 per meal in November of next year.

Media Matters says conservatives are trying to bully society’s most vulnerable members.

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“By bullying into silence those who would talk openly about their experiences with successful anti-poverty programs – and whitewashing studies proving these programs to be effective – the media create an environment conducive to eviscerating the safety net,” the media monitoring group stated.

And that’s exactly what the Republican majority in the House of Representatives is already doing.

“The House Agriculture Committee, which the House-approved budget requires to quickly produce \$33 billion in savings over the next decade, approved a proposal that would obtain the entire amount from cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps,” said the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. “The cuts – which would come on top of another proposal in the House budget to cut SNAP by \$133 billion over the next decade and convert it to a block grant – would reduce or eliminate benefits for all SNAP households, including the poorest.”

The Center observed, “No other program under the Committee’s jurisdiction would face any cut under the proposal, despite frequent calls for reform of the nation’s farm subsidies – 74 percent of which go to the largest, most profitable farms...[that] received an average annual government payment of more than \$30,000 a year in 2009, while having an average annual household income of over \$160,000.”

Those corporate welfare recipients are the ones who should be ashamed, not people who are down on their luck through no fault of their own.

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