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Unshared Recovery: 46 Million Poor; Poverty Rate Unchanged

Congress Should Invest in Proven Anti-Poverty Programs and Reject More Cuts and Shutdowns

Statement by Deborah Weinstein, Executive Director, Coalition on Human Needs

Editor's note: Executive Director Deborah Weinstein is available for interviews today.

"The number of Americans living in poverty remained stuck at more than 46 million last year, not statistically different from 2013. Disappointingly, economic growth is hardly reaching America's poor. The poverty rate is down from its peak of 15.1 percent in post-recession 2010, but, at 14.8 percent, is well over the 12.5 percent rate in 2007, before the Great Recession took hold. There are still more than 15 million poor children, more than one in five. Damaging inequality continues, with more than one in three African American children (36 percent) and about one-third of Latino children (32 percent) living in poverty. For white non-Hispanic children, the poverty rate was 12.3 percent. There are many troubling signs: nearly one in ten of our children is living below half the poverty line (the official threshold is \$18,850 for a family of three). Hardship is broadly shared: for another year, one-third of the nation is uncomfortably close to poverty (below twice the poverty line).

"While economic gains are not reaching the poor in a sustained way, government programs are helping. The Census Bureau's new report shows that low-income tax credits, nutrition and housing programs, Social Security and SSI are among the programs that work to lift families out of poverty. Even counting only part of the Child Tax Credit, the Census Bureau finds low-income tax credits lift more than 5 million children out of poverty. SNAP lifts a similar number of people out of poverty. Congress' first order of business should be to protect and expand these programs. And yet, with only a few days before the end of the fiscal year, the Congressional majority is divided and apparently paralyzed. Every day they fail to act risks stalling the modest progress only just beginning to reach the poor.

"The proportion of Americans without health insurance has dropped substantially, with 10.4 percent reporting they had been uninsured for the whole year in 2014. Tax credits for low-income families encourage work and lift millions out of poverty. SNAP (formerly food stamps) helps children to grow up healthy and keeps millions from being poor. Poverty rates would be higher without rental assistance, and young children receive lifelong economic benefits from Head Start. And yet, right wing members of Congress threaten all these programs. Today's reports show that the economic recovery is offering only halting and inadequate progress for the poor, but that government services make an important difference. That makes it even more essential that Congress invests in these programs, and rejects cuts and shutdowns."

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The Coalition on Human Needs (CHN) is an alliance of national organizations working together to promote public policies that address the needs of low-income and other vulnerable populations. The CHN's members include service providers and faith groups, civil rights, religious, labor and professional organizations and those concerned with the well-being of children, women, the elderly and people with disabilities. For more, visit www.chn.org.