

Rochester Business Journal Power Breakfast Series:
“Rochester’s Crisis of Poverty”
Hyatt Hotel - Rochester, NY
January 29, 2015

My notes on remarks of Peter B. Edelman, Director, Center on Poverty, Inequality, and Public Policy, Georgetown University Law School. - Bruce Popper, Vice-president, 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East.

Over 500 people attended the event. Introductory remarks were delivered by United Way of Greater Rochester President Peter Carpino and New York State Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Director Vincent Esposito. Both cited the fact that Rochester is the 3rd or 5th poorest city in the United States (depending on which source one uses), and 7th worst in the rate of children in poverty. 50% of Rochester’s children live in poverty. The Governor’s appointment of a Rochester Anti-poverty Task Force was cited. Mr. Carpino described its mission as a ‘makeover of the current delivery system of services to the poor, a new, more coordinated model.’

Professor Edelman’s remarks began with a debunking of the myth that the War on Poverty did not work. “That statement is wrong!”

Social Security, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Earned Income Tax Credit, Pell Grants, and others, up to and including the Affordable Care Act, have had a significant impact in reducing poverty. “These policies have worked.” Poverty would be so much worse today if it were not for these programs.

Yet, there are still 45 million Americans still in poverty.

The root causes can be found in nine changes in our country since the 1960s.

- (1) **LOW WAGES** - “We have become a low wage nation.” Low wages are by far the single leading cause of poverty in America.
- globalization
 - the decline of unions
 - 40 years of wage stagnation
 - half of all full-time jobs pay an annual salary of less than \$35,000

- (2) **FAMILY** - increase in single parent households.
- need paid family leave, the only advanced economy without it
 - need better public transportation
 - need child care support

(3) **CRISIS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION** - not meeting the needs of higher skill and technical jobs.

(4) **MASS INCARCERATION** - especially of African American males.

- record of conviction makes employment nearly impossible
- leads to a life of poverty
- clearly and indisputably unfair criminal justice system (cite: Ferguson, MO; Staten Island, NY; Cleveland, OH)

(5) **INNER CITY CONCENTRATION OF POVERTY**

(6) **DEEP POVERTY** - incomes that are below one-half of the poverty line.

- 1996 Transitional Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
- 6 million people have only food stamps for income
- destruction of bipartisan support and new attack on food stamps

(7) **HOMELESSNESS** - lack of affordable housing.

(8) **RACE/ETHNICITY/GENDER** - discrimination in all aspects of life.

- racism

(9) **INEQUALITY** - all the money goes to the top 1%.

- threat to democracy (cite: the Koch Brothers)

Final cite: Children's Defense Fund, "Ending Child Poverty Now" (January 28, 2015).

<http://www.childrensdefense.org/library/PovertyReport/EndingChildPovertyNow.html>

* Children's Defense Fund (CDF) - Professor Edelman is married to CDF President Marion Wright Edelman, and 1199 SEIU President George Gresham serves on the CDF board of directors.