

DMIBLOG

Politics, Policy, and the American Dream

MARGY WALLER

A New Poverty Measure: So What?

This week, [Mayor Michael Bloomberg](#) proposed changing the formula for measuring poverty. Now Congressional leaders are holding [a hearing](#) on adopting a similar change at the national level.

This is all much ado about almost nothing.

At the national level, the proposal would move the bar ever so slightly, so that [being poor equals household income](#) of less than \$21,818 for two adults with two children, up from the current \$20,444.

To be sure, the new measure would be a better reflection of the rate of material deprivation in our nation than the current one.

Today's measure still uses a formula based on 1950s household expenditures – before housing and transportation costs went up and two-income households became the requirement, causing average child care expenses to soar. In contrast, the new measure would allow for regional reflection of differences in the cost of living and would count some federally-funded employment benefits as income for the first time.

Yet, it's important to note that we aren't really accomplishing what we desire with this goal – even with a more accurate formula! This is especially true since this high-level reconsideration of the formula is occurring at a time when there are numerous calls for a national goal to reduce poverty by 50 percent over the next ten years.

[Continue reading "A New Poverty Measure: So What?"](#)

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- [The clock is ticking on foreclosure prevention \(3\)](#)

CORINNE RAMEY

“Clean Coal” Plant Scrapped for Financial Reasons

It’s not news that “clean coal” isn’t, well, clean. But clean coal made the news today not for environmental reasons but for financial ones when the [New York Power Authority](#) scrapped its plans for the Huntley plant, a “clean coal” facility in western New York State. From [Crain’s Business News](#):

NYPA officials say the electricity produced by the Huntley plant, in Tonawanda, N.Y., would be too expensive, requiring some \$150 million a year in subsidies to compete with more conventional sources of generation. In a letter to New Jersey-based NRG Energy, which owns the Huntley plant, NYPA executives said they were not able to overcome the “substantial” financial hurdles.

The announcement calls into doubt the construction of a similar clean coal plant in Jamestown, New York, which is supposed to receive \$6 million in state funding.

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Posted at 5:08 PM, Jul 16, 2008 in [Energy & Environment](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(1\)](#)



MARK WINSTON GRIFFITH

Hey, Freddie and Fannie: What about consumers?

Economic [news lately](#) has focused on the failing financial health of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the country’s largest purchasers of home mortgages. Wall Street is on edge, fearing that other financial institutions will also experience severe drops in stock market value and that the entire American financial system is in jeopardy. Mortgage loan volume is down and the housing market, already bad, could get a helluva lot worse.

With all this the-sky-is-falling, macro-economic anxiety, one obvious, but seldom heard concern these days is, what about consumers? How will working class families fare in trying to enter the middle class through home ownership? As Grethen Morgenson of the New York Times [recently commented](#), the “ownership society” wasn’t supposed to go down like this.

[Continue reading "Hey, Freddie and Fannie: What about consumers?"](#)

Posted at 10:24 AM, Jul 16, 2008 in [Economic Opportunity](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)



I Stop Foreclosure 4 U, 1:54 pm Tue
[Mental Illness and the Death Penalty \(2\)](#)
akkirocks, 4:53 pm Mon

[Consumer Product Safety Commission Reform Act of 2008](#)

VOTES: 79% WITH MIDDLE CLASS; 13% AGAINST MIDDLE CLASS; 8% DID NOT VOTE

[Foreclosure Prevention Act of 2008](#)

VOTES: 48% WITH MIDDLE CLASS; 46% AGAINST MIDDLE CLASS; 6% DID NOT VOTE

[Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act of 2008](#)

VOTES: 62% WITH MIDDLE CLASS; 34% AGAINST MIDDLE CLASS; 3% DID NOT VOTE

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DMI ON YOUTUBE

ANDREA BATISTA SCHLESINGER**Don't worry, says the American Enterprise Institute. Be happy!**

I'm not surprised that the [new head of the American Enterprise Institute](#) is an expert on happiness. They must need a dose.

It is the home, after all, of the discredited John Bolton, the discredited Paul Wolfowitz, the discredited Richard Perle, the fiction writer Lynne Cheney, the fiction perpetrator Dick Cheney, and lots of other people whose ideas have left us poorer and humbler, surveilled and bankrupt, unpopular and... unhappy.

Arthur Brooks writes about happiness a lot. It was in response to an editorial in the Wall Street Journal that I wrote this letter to the editor, which, to their credit, they printed. Brooks maintained that billionaires were happy not because they were rich, but because they were able to create value, their motivating factor. In response, **I said:**

[Continue reading "Don't worry, says the American Enterprise Institute. Be happy!"](#)

Posted at 5:29 PM, Jul 15, 2008 in [Economy](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

**MELISSA HALE WOODMAN****We Need Artists, Too!**

Support for artists in our society is often lacking. Though artists serve our communities by stimulating our imaginations, revitalizing cultural vitality, provoking ideas through cultural commentary and promoting social change and dialogue, many struggle to make ends meet. Health care, insurance, decent housing and space to create are too often inaccessible or unaffordable.

Unlike the tradition of art in Europe, where artists were historically viewed as a crucial part of society's fabric, in America, art is often viewed as inconsequential whimsy. We live in a culture that rewards predominant values of "hard work" and "industry" rather than "imagination" and "play." Federal funding for the arts continues to be cut, while the role of arts in education continues to shrink.

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Posted at 6:41 AM, Jul 15, 2008 in [New York](#) | [Progressive Agenda](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)



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CORINNE RAMEY

Can We Talk About Poverty?

Last Wednesday, I saw John Edwards speak at the [Yorkville Common Pantry](#), a food pantry and soup kitchen in Harlem. After walking into the building, I found myself in the back of a small press conference, just a few feet from Edwards. The beginning of the press conference started out as expected — he talked about [Half in Ten](#), his anti-poverty campaign to reduce poverty in America by half within the next ten years, and praised the food pantry for their work in New York City. But after his five minute speech, when it was time for questions from the press, the subject quickly turned away from poverty.

Although Edwards tried his best to talk about poverty, the press just didn't seem to care. Instead, their questions focused almost exclusively on the presidential campaign. If Obama offers you a position as attorney general, will you take it? Is it mere coincidence that you're in New York City within 48 hours of Obama and Clinton's joint appearance here? Do you think that Obama is moving towards the center, and do you support that?

[Continue reading "Can We Talk About Poverty?"](#)

Posted at 1:53 PM, Jul 14, 2008 in [Economic Opportunity](#) | [Financial Justice](#) | [Progressive Agenda](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(3\)](#)

**CRISTINA JIMENEZ**

Immigration Debate: Lies, Hate, and Lack of True Journalism

Last month I wrote about a [Media Matters report](#) that revealed that when it comes to immigration and undocumented immigrants, instead of news and/or facts, we are getting a bunch of lies and misinformation. Cable news anchors like CNN's Lou Dobbs and Fox's Bill O'Reilly use their "news shows" to promote a message of fear and anger, creating and encouraging hate and a strong sense of resentment against undocumented immigrants.

The result: (nothing positive of course) [hate groups in the United States have increased by half since the year 2000](#) and the number of [new anti-immigrant groups increased to 300](#).

[Continue reading "Immigration Debate: Lies, Hate, and Lack of True Journalism"](#)

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Where Has the American Dream Gone?

cross-posted from Long Island WINS

One of the things that I hear most often is "Why don't THEY learn to speak English?" Which is usually followed by "my grandparents came here without speaking a word of English and learned, how come THEY can't do the same?"

I should preface my comments with this...I am fascinated by different languages. I think each dialect is beautiful. I moved around a lot after high school and always naturally gravitated towards living in Latino communities. I've found that even though our languages may be different, our emotions are all the same. The tone, the pointedness, the physical dialogue....a smile...tell me as much information as I would need to know if I knew the language. I have had great relationships with people that I completely couldn't understand....literally not one word. Humans are incredible like that. We have so many other senses and knowledge, that we can figure it out.

However, I am not naive. I know to learn and grow in America, you need to know English, albeit even if it's broken English. And that's why people come to America for right, a better life for themselves and their family?

[Continue reading "Where Has the American Dream Gone?"](#)

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JOHN PETRO

NYTimes Headline Says Beware: City is becoming more pleasant

I read the headline in today's *New York Times* with alarm: "Closing on Broadway: Two traffic lanes."

"There must have been some sort of terrible accident," I thought, "or maybe a [manhole cover explosion](#), or a King-Kong style attack!"

But after reading the article, I found that instead the headline could have read more like this: "Changes on Broadway to Increase Access for Bicycles, Create Public Spaces, Add Greenery and Amenities: Changes contribute to cutting pollution, oil-dependence, obesity, and making life in the city a little bit better." A bit wordy for a headline, perhaps, but more fitting.

New York City's Department of Transportation is changing the layout of seven blocks in Midtown Manhattan along Broadway, from [Times Square to Herald Square](#) (of Macy's fame). The changes include a new separated and protected bike lane and pedestrian islands complete with landscaping and street furniture.

[Continue reading "NYTimes Headline Says Beware: City is becoming more pleasant"](#)

Posted at 2:28 PM, Jul 11, 2008 in [Cities](#) | [Environmental Justice](#) | [New York](#) | [Transportation](#) | [Urban Affairs](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)



JOHN BOUMAN

Healthcare for all – Don't wait, don't spectate – take action

There is a risk, right now, that a prime opportunity to accomplish affordable quality healthcare choices for everyone could be lost, just like all those other times when we had historic moments that could have produced that big outcome, but didn't. Curiously, one of the main factors creating the historic moment this time is also a factor that could undermine it. That is, as has happened in the past, we have a chance to elect a President who wants to get it done. Leadership from the top is a huge factor that makes this moment so pregnant with possibility.

Why does this positive factor also undermine the moment? Because the temptation for all of us is to lapse into spectator mode. To be fans, just watching the election and then just watching to see how the new President does. As fans, we stop taking action. If that is what happens, the chances for achieving the full reform would be significantly harmed.

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JACQUES LAROCHE

A New New Deal



Many of us are inclined to believe that in regards to the election (and America's trajectory) there are only two scenarios in store:

- (1) A presidential victory on the part of McCain (at which time we would be in serious trouble for a myriad of reasons, which I will not get into here)
- (2) A presidential victory on the part of Obama (at which time we can breath easy)

Unfortunately, scenario (2) is a fallacy - a pernicious trap. What America desperately needs is a resurgence in **Keynesianism** - A New New Deal. In other words, we need to demand that our government be accountable to us,

ratchet down the veritable omnipotence of the corporation, and protect us from the vagaries of capitalism. If not, the powerful interests of the state will co-opt our elected leaders, leaving us with hollow dreams. So we must push for what we want, and history teaches us that people power works; this is how the New Deal became a reality. After the Great Depression, Americans were fervently pushing for change. Socialist activist farmers in Kansas were fighting for workers rights, Alabama was rife with progressive communists, the general mood was progressive. Faced with such overwhelming popular support for social change, **Roosevelt** was forced to enact the New Deal to appease the masses and quash the rising power of rival political parties.

[Continue reading "A New New Deal"](#)

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HARRY MOROZ

Mayor Dean of Nashville: Why Are We Still Talking about Mass Transit?

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Senators Obama and McCain plod along through [political realignments](#), off-the-cuff [slips of true feelings](#), and downright ["disgraceful" remarks](#). Congress [balks](#) at upholding even the most basic civil liberties, [procrastinates](#) on housing legislation, and [puffs its chest](#) with short-term fixes to a [long-term oil problem](#).

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MARK WINSTON GRIFFITH

Federal Foreclosure Response: Too Little Too Late

Yesterday, in a stunning view into how disconnected the men running America's banking policy are from on-the-ground reality in America, Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke said that it wasn't "too early" to begin thinking about how to avoid subprime disasters and foreclosures in the future.

No shucks, Sherlock.

[Continue reading "Federal Foreclosure Response: Too Little Too Late"](#)

Posted at 9:59 AM, Jul 09, 2008 in [Economy](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

**KIA FRANKLIN**

Death on a Hospital Waiting Room Floor

You'd think after [Beatrice Vance](#) of Illinois and [Edith Isabel Rodriguez](#) of California both died on the ER waiting room floor while hospital staff just looked on, that maybe hospitals would be on red alert to avoid this type of bad publicity—not to mention the loss of human life.

But now there is the story of [Esmine Green](#), 49, of New York. She, too, died on the hospital waiting room floor while patients and hospital staff looked on. Surveillance video showed a guard rolling his desk chair around to get a better look as Green writhed in pain, and patients watched unflinchingly from just feet away. This horrific tale is a sad commentary on the state of human compassion and the state of our health care system.

[Continue reading "Death on a Hospital Waiting Room Floor"](#)

Posted at 2:34 PM, Jul 08, 2008 in [Civil Justice](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

**CORINNE RAMEY**

Women's Equality ... Why Not Now?

Huffington Post's [Marcia Yerman](#) wrote about DMI's book discussion with Carolyn Maloney. She writes,

The July 4th weekend is over, and I am still reflecting on where women are in the political and cultural landscape of America. Firecrackers and picnics aside, Abigail Adams didn't get to sign the Declaration of Independence, Betsy Ross sewed the flag, and how many people even know who Deborah Samson Gannett was?

In late June, I attended a panel discussion hosted by the Drum Major Institute for Public Policy. The topic was "the status of women in society, and the policies needed to close the gender gap." DMI defines itself as "a progressive policy institute dedicated to challenging the tired orthodoxies of both the right and the left." Five women joined Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney to examine issues she has written about in her new book, *Rumors of Our Progress Have Been Greatly Exaggerated: Why Women's Lives Aren't Getting Any Easier - and How We Can Make Real Progress for Ourselves and Our Daughters*.

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