

John Edwards on Welfare & Poverty

2004 Democratic Nominee for Vice President; Former Jr Senator (NC)

A comprehensive, detailed plan to end poverty

I was the first to come out with a universal health care plan, first to come out with a global warming plan, and the only to come out with a comprehensive, detailed plan to end poverty in the US, since we are on Dr. King's day. This is the cause of my life. Everything I have proposed, I have come up with a way to pay for it. I've been very explicit about how it should be paid for, not abstract, not rhetoric, very, very explicit.

Source: 2008 Congressional Black Caucus Democratic debate Jan 21, 2008

Ending poverty is the single most important cause in my life

Ending poverty is the cause, the single most important cause in my life. I'm not suggesting for a minute the two of them haven't spoken about it, because they obviously have. But I have made it central to what I'm doing, central to my campaign and I have been trying to drive it in this campaign & welcome everything they have to say. I have a comprehensive set of ideas about how we end poverty. It is a huge moral issue facing the US, and it is an enormous issue facing the African American community. If you're black, you're much more likely to be poor, you're much less likely to have health care coverage. That community is hurt worse by poverty than any community in America. It's our responsibility, not just for the African American community, but for America, as a nation, to take on this moral challenge, to try as best we can to walk in the shadow of Dr. King and try to make certain that we take this cause on, and I intend to do it. It will be central to the work that I do as president of the US.

Source: 2008 Congressional Black Caucus Democratic debate Jan 21, 2008

37 million Americans live in poverty

We have 200,000 men and women who wore our uniform who are homeless every single night. We talk about 37 million Americans who live in poverty in the richest nation on the planet. I've been to hundreds of places around this country who take care of the poorest of the poor, extraordinary, wonderful places. I was with a woman in Kansas City who worked full-time. She had several children. Every night in the winter, she could not pay both her heating bill and her rent. She had to choose. Single mom, workin full-time, she had to put her kids in all of their winter clothing, in their coats, bundle them up in the bed together, put as many blankets on top of them as she could. She'd get them out of bed in the morning and send them off to school. The last thing she would say to them? "Please, for goodness's sakes, don't tell anybody at school what's happening here, because

they'll come and take you away from me." No mother in the US should have to live like that. We are a better country than that

Source: 2008 Congressional Black Caucus Democratic debate Jan 21, 2008

The minimum wage should be at least \$9.50 an hour

The national minimum wage should be at least \$9-and-a-half an hour. It ought to be indexed to go up on its own.

Source: 2008 Democratic debate in Las Vegas Jan 15, 2008

Poverty in America is the cause of my life

The issue of poverty in America is the cause of my life. It's the reason I started a poverty center at UNC.

And I think the starting place is to understand that there is no one single cause of poverty. You know, when you have young African- American men who are completely convinced that they're either going to die or go to prison, and see absolutely no hope in their lives; when they live in an environment where the people around them don't earn a decent wage; when they go to schools that are second-class schools compared to the schools in wealthy suburban areas, they don't see anything getting better, there are lots of things that we need to do.

We ought to actually provide incentive pay to get our best teachers in the inner-city schools & into poor rural areas where they're needed the most. We need to significantly raise the minimum wage. We need to strengthen the right to organize. And we need to help low-income families save so they're not prey to predatory lenders.

Source: [2007 Democratic Primary Debate at Howard University](#) Jun 28, 2007

A million new Section 8 vouchers; let poor move freely

Our national housing policy is a disaster. We cluster poor people together. We feed the cycle of poverty.

We have thousands of people across this country waiting five, six, seven years to get a Section 8 housing voucher. Suppose we have a million new Section 8 housing vouchers, and instead of using them to cluster poor people together, we use them to break down some of these economic and racial barriers so that people can move. It should not be, not in the United States of America, that the only people that can go to another neighborhood or another place are people of wealth. That's not America. That's not who we are. Suppose we create a million new stepping-stone jobs so that kids who are having trouble getting work, chronically out of work, we can put them to work in our parks, in our libraries, in public work so that they can have a job so that they can develop a work ethic.

Source: [Take Back America 2007 Conference](#) Jun 19, 2007

Despite mistake on \$400 haircut, understands poverty

Q: You've spoken with great passion and energy and eloquence about the issue of poverty---your "two Americas" theme. But one journalist criticizes you on this issue: "Many people miss the point about the haircuts. The point is not the cost. John Edwards is a very rich man and could afford even a \$400 haircut. But why did he pay for his haircuts out of campaign funds?"

A: Well, that was a mistake, which we've remedied. It was simply a mistake. But if the question is whether I live a privileged and blessed lifestyle now, the answer to that's yes. A lot of us do. But it's not where I come from. And I've not forgotten where I come from. Many people know that my dad worked in textile mills all his life. The reason I'm running for president of the United States is so that everybody in this country can have the same kind of chances I've had.

Source: [2007 South Carolina Democratic primary debate, on MSNBC](#) Apr 26, 2007

Give poor a stake with "automatic 401k" & kids' savings

There are a variety of strategies to give more Americans a stake in our economy.

- Children's Savings Accounts have real potential. Imagine how a few thousand dollars in the bank can transform a poor child's sense of hope and possibility for the future.
- A progressive tax credit could remedy inequalities in our tax code and help millions of first-time homebuyers.
- A work bonds tax credit that would give low-income workers \$500 toward a new bank account or safe investment fund.
- An "automatic 401(k) " proposal is a proven method to encourage retirement savings.
- An initiative to establish bank accounts for the 22 million American households without them. These families--who can ill afford any unnecessary expenses--pay check cashers billions of dollars every year for services most banks provide for free.
- Finally, strong protections against predatory lending would protect the assets that families have worked hard to build.

Source: [Ending Poverty in America, by John Edwards, p.261](#) Apr 2, 2007

Principles against poverty:work, opportunity, thrift, family

The seemingly unrelated problems faced by poor Americans are actually inextricably connected. The problems of poverty--too few jobs, debt, bad housing, bad schools, illness, and fragile families--cannot be understood or solved in isolation.

However, these problems do share one characteristic: the surest route to addressing them is by applying the time-tested ideals at the heart of the American bargain. Our nation was built on the values of hard work, equal opportunity, thrift, and strong families. Today these principles light the way forward.

1. Americans believe deeply in the value of work. Work is the pathway to success and security, but also the source of dignity and independence and self-respect.
2. Our nation was founded as the land of opportunity, and we should strive to provide equal opportunity.
3. Anti-poverty programs should recognize the importance of savings.
4. Americans believe in the importance of community, responsibility, and, most of all, family.

Source: [Ending Poverty in America, by John Edwards, p.259](#) Apr 2, 2007

Housing vouchers, not housing projects

We should fight concentrated poverty with a combination of strategies for both inner-city neighborhoods and the broader regional economies. We should also expand housing vouchers. Vouchers--rather than housing projects built in low-income areas--allow

families to escape to safe communities with good schools. We can get better results at lower cost by radically overhauling the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development and giving more authority to states and cities.

Source: [Ending Poverty in America](#), by John Edwards, p.262 Apr 2, 2007

37M in poverty is a plague on America

America is the richest nation on the face of the earth. It is the richest nation in all of history. Yet in the middle of this abundance 37 million of us live in poverty. The problem is that a number lacks a human face. Statistics do not struggle. They do not go to bed hungry, wake up cold, or give up on hope.

The real story is not the number but the people behind the number. The men, women, and children living in poverty--one in eight of us--do not have enough money for the food, shelter, and clothing they need. One in eight. That is not a problem. That is not a challenge. That is a plague. And it is our national shame.

Source: [Ending Poverty in America, by John Edwards, p.256](#) Apr 2, 2007

Poverty is America's greatest challenge--for citizens & govt

Poverty is America's great moral challenge in our time, and it will take all of us to meet it. This is not a problem that can be left to the government alone. This is a problem that requires the will and commitment of all of us, working as voters, as citizens, and as neighbors. It requires us to make demands of our leaders and ourselves.

I have talked to people living on the margins. I met a single mother with two children. She has a job that pays \$9.50 an hour. She told me about winters where the "choice was between lights and gas." She chose the lights. No one who works hard should be faced with that kind of choice or that kind of worry.

Ending poverty may seem impossible, but it is not. If we can put a man on the moon, nearly double the length of a human life, and put entire libraries on chips the size of postage stamps, then we can end poverty for those who want to work.

Source: [Ending Poverty in America, by John Edwards, p.257](#) Apr 2, 2007

Poverty is such low priority, we have no accurate statistics

However, it is clear that progress against poverty has stalled. The poverty rate is higher than it was 30 years ago. The public debate on poverty policies is stuck in a rut. One side downplays the importance of strong families and personal responsibility. The other side is driven by a deep skepticism of what government can accomplish. Both sides are right, and both sides are wrong: greater government efforts and greater personal responsibility are both necessary.

Poverty is such a low priority in Washington that politicians are not even interested in developing an accurate statistic. The official measure of Americans living in poverty is incomplete and out-of-date, according to the National Academy of Sciences, and probably undercounts the number of the poor. We do not even count all the poor; this is a perfect metaphor for how poverty is ignored.

Source: [Ending Poverty in America, by John Edwards, p.258](#) Apr 2, 2007

30-year goal: Ending poverty in America

People ask what they can do to fight poverty. Getting involved in your community is the first step. That is as simple as finding some place to volunteer--as a mentor for a young person, a caregiver for an elderly person, or a homebuilder for a homeless family.

If we are going to build a national movement that demands actions from our leaders, each of us also needs to participate in the policy debate and raise awareness among friends and neighbors. We should all pledge to keep talking about poverty until it is at the top of the national agenda. And we should pledge to hold our government accountable for ignoring the suffering of so many for so long.

We should not be satisfied with a modest improvement. Let us set a national goal--the elimination of poverty in America in 30 years. It will not be easy, but I believe in the unlimited power of the American people to accomplish anything we set our hearts and minds to achieve. If we do not rest until poverty is history, it will be.

Source: [Ending Poverty in America, by John Edwards, p.266](#) Apr 2, 2007

EITC is a well-run gov't program that decreased poverty

The number of Americans living in poverty is increasing. We have more millionaires, but we have more bankruptcies and hunger and homelessness. This is one of the great moral issues of our time. Sen. Edwards and the One America Committee are committed to doing everything in our power to lift more Americans out of poverty and into the middle class. We know what the problem is. In 2004, 37 million Americans lived below the poverty line, a 1.1 million person increase from 2003.

When programs to combat poverty are well run, they can make a difference. In the 1990s, the Earned Income Tax Credit lifted 7 million people out of poverty. Government programs, when they encourage people to take the initiative and improve their lives, can be effective. The EITC is one of the most important anti-poverty tax programs, yet 25% of eligible American taxpayers don't know to apply for it. We need to get the right information in the hands of these workers who need it for themselves and their families.

Source: PAC website, www.OneAmericaCommittee.com, "Action" Nov 17, 2006

Raise the minimum wage and training fund to help the poor

We will raise the minimum wage to \$7.00 an hour by 2007. At this minimum wage a family of four with a full-time worker would no longer be forced to raise their children in poverty, increase tax credits for child care, an essential ingredient in ensuring the continued success of work-based welfare reform; defend and strengthen the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), increasing the reward to work for the most hard-pressed families and lifting millions out of poverty; invest in programs like Youthbuild that educate and prepare disadvantaged young people for jobs; encourage more women and minorities to pursue degrees in math and science, which lead to high paying jobs; invest in lifelong learning so that workers of all skill levels can access education and training to move up to better, higher paying jobs; and encourage entrepreneurship in all our communities through initiatives like the New Markets venture capital initiative.

Source: [Xref Kerry] Our Plan for America , p. 22 Aug 10, 2004

Moral responsibility to help 35 million Americans in poverty

We can do something about 35 million Americans who live in poverty every day. And here's why we shouldn't just talk about, but do something about it: because it is wrong. And we have a moral responsibility to lift those families up. We have children going to bed hungry? We have children who don't have the clothes to keep them warm? We have millions of Americans who work full-time every day to support their families, working for minimum wage, and still live in poverty. It's wrong.

Source: Acceptance speech to the Democratic National Convention Jul 28, 2004

Raise minimum wage so full-time workers are out of poverty

There are men & women who are living up to their bargain, working hard and supporting their families. Their families are doing their part; it's time we did our part. We're going to raise the minimum wage, we're going to finish the job on welfare reform, and we're going to bring good-paying jobs to the places where we need them the most. And by doing all those things, we're going to say no forever to any American working full-time and living in poverty. Not in our America, not in our America.

Source: Acceptance speech to the Democratic National Convention Jul 28, 2004

We need to talk about 35 million who live in poverty

There's been no discussion about 35 million Americans who live in poverty. Millions of Americans who work full-time for minimum wage and live in poverty. In a country of our wealth and prosperity, we have children going to bed hungry. We have children who don't have the clothes to keep them warm. Maybe on some poll, that may not be a big issue, but it's important. The Democratic presidential candidates have a moral responsibility to talk about it and do something about it, because it's wrong.

Source: Democratic 2004 Primary Debate at St. Anselm College Jan 22, 2004

Increase the Earned Income Tax Credit

I would increase the Earned Income Tax Credit to help poor Americans. I would also provide more support for child care and transportation, and lead efforts to ensure that fathers take responsibility for their children.

Source: Vote-Smart Presidential National Political Awareness Test Jan 8, 2004

My "Cities Rising" plan is to help urban America

Q: What is your urban agenda?

EDWARDS: I have a plan called Cities Rising. The idea is to bring jobs to urban America. Let's create incentives for new businesses, incentives for existing businesses. Second, to do something about public school systems. First, pay teachers better. Second, give bonus pay to teachers who will teach in schools in less-advantaged areas. And create wealth for things like homeownership.

Source: Democratic Presidential 2004 Primary Debate in Detroit Oct 27, 2003

Bush honors wealth while we honor work

The fundamental difference between George Bush and us is that he honors wealth, and we honor work. We believe in giving real chance to every single American. He takes the side of insiders, we take the side of regular Americans. Look at this tax cut. He's about rewarding wealth, not work. He wants to make sure that we leave out millions and millions of working families and put a priority on cutting taxes for those who get money from trust funds, instead of those who drive the cars & answer the phones for those who get money from trust funds. These are not the values of the American people! What's the thread connecting all this? They value wealth, they want to protect it. They value wealth, while we value the work that creates it. We cannot play defense with this President, we must play offense. We must take this right at him, in the toughest possible way. This is a fight about values, this is a fight for the American people and it is a fight we will win!

Source: [Speech at 2003 Take Back America Conference, Washington, DC](#) Jun 5, 2003

Fully fund AmeriCorps.

Edwards signed a letter from 43 Senators to the President

To: President George W. Bush

Dear President Bush:

We write to express our strong support for AmeriCorps and recognize the leadership you have shown on this issue over the years. We know you agree that AmeriCorps is an outstanding program which has proven successful in addressing our homeland security needs, leveraging volunteers, and improving the quality of services available to a broad range of Americans.

Unfortunately, as you know, the Corporation for National Service officially announced yesterday unprecedented and drastic funding cuts, from 50 to 95 percent in every state. These cuts mean that under the State Competitive funding stream the Corporation will only fund 2,036 volunteers, compared with 11,236 last year. Many states will see their volunteer allocations under the competitive stream drop by as much as 90 percent and 16 states are shut out completely.

In your 2002 State of the Union address, you called for every American to dedicate 4,000 hours to community service throughout their lives. In your 2004 budget request, you proposed increasing the number of AmeriCorps volunteers from 50,000 to 75,000. Unfortunately, due to serious errors made by the Corporation, fewer than half this number of Americans will be allowed to serve their country through service.

We should support, not oppose, efforts to encourage more Americans to enter public service. We should do everything in our power to reward the American men and women who have chosen to serve the country and their communities in the hope of meeting the nation's critical education, safety, health, and homeland security needs.

We urge you to request additional funding in the supplemental appropriations bill to ensure that AmeriCorps remains a strong and vital program today and in the future.

Source: Letter from 43 Senators to the President [03-SENS](#) on Jun 17, 2003

http://www.ontheissues.org/2008/John_Edwards_Welfare_+_Poverty.htm