

America's Hidden Hunger Crisis

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Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

Imagine tens of millions hungry in the world's richest country. Imagine bipartisan complicity ignoring a growing crisis.

Imagine uncaring policymakers. Imagine them cutting vital programs able to help when sizable increases are needed.

Imagine serving monied interests at the expense of popular ones. Imagine enriching themselves in the process.

Outnumber Hunger (OH) is a nationwide campaign. It enlists people in the growing fight against hunger. It works cooperatively with Feeding America (FA). More on FA below.

Hunger is a major problem. For nearly 50 million Americans, it's a daily reality. Around 13 million families are affected. Most are hardworking ones.

They don't earn enough to live on. Census data show poverty conditions or borderline ones affect around half of US households.

Kids don't get enough to eat. Around 16 million are affected. [Feeding America](#) is the nation's "leading domestic hunger-relief charity."

Its mission is "feed(ing) America's hungry." Its nationwide food bank network does so. It can't keep up with demand. Increasingly it outstrips supply.

According to FA's media relations director Ross Fraser:

"Food insecurity is higher than at any time since the Great Depression." One in six Americans face hunger. So do one in five children.

Missing meals is common practice. Nutritious balanced diets for growing millions don't exist. Belly-fillers substitute.

Protracted Main Street Depression conditions persist. Things go from bad to worse. Food stamps provide a woefully inadequate \$1.40 per person per meal.

Food banks supplement recipients when monthly benefits run out. Most often it's around 10 days or more before month's end.

America is the land of I don't care. Equity and justice aren't in its vocabulary. Official numbers understate reality. Growing millions suffer out of sight and mind.

America's wealth doesn't help. Congress is dismissive. Food stamps were cut when most needed. More cuts are planned.

Last December, 1.3 million Americans lost unemployment benefits. Another 73,000 more joined them weekly.

On April 7, Senate members extended emergency benefits for five months. It did so retroactively from December 28.

House Republicans blocked legislation. Millions of America's jobless face harder than ever hard times. House Democrats circulated a discharge petition.

If enough Republicans join them, an immediate vote is required. So far, a majority is lacking. House Republican leaders block extended unemployment compensation (EUC).

US resources go for war-making. Corporate handouts matter more. Vital needs increasingly go begging. Thirdworldizing America is official policy. Privileged interests alone benefit.

America's wealth disparity is deplorable. The top 1% owns over half the nation's wealth. The bottom 90% has a decreasing share. Social inequality is institutionalized. It's unprecedented or close to it.

It matches or exceeds 19th century harshness. Protracted Depression conditions affect growing millions.

Poverty, unemployment, homelessness and hunger approach record levels. Millions struggle to pay rent, service mortgages, cover medical bills, heat homes, and manage other daily expenses.

Growing numbers don't get enough to eat. Social justice is fast disappearing. Monied interests alone matter.

America was never beautiful. For sure it's not now. Sink or swim defines policy. Growing hunger perhaps stands out most of all.

On April 16, [USA Today](#) headlined "Hunger is a 'silent crisis' in the USA," saying:

"Tianna Gaines Turner can't remember the last time she went to bed without worrying about how she was going to feed her three children."

"She can't remember the last time she woke up and wasn't worried about how she and her husband would make enough in their part-time jobs to buy groceries and pay utilities on their apartment in a working-class section of Philadelphia."

"And she can't remember the last time she felt confident she and her husband wouldn't have to skip meals so their children could eat."

Similar stories repeat nationwide. Parents struggle to feed children. Low-pay/part-time jobs don't provide enough to live on.

Millions of unemployed have no steady income. Government benefits increasingly are slashed.

Nicki Maxwell and her husband are like millions of other parents. They struggle daily to feed children. They turn to food pantries for help. They have no other choice.

"I remember feeling really hopeless," said Nicki. "I was depressed. I didn't know what to do. I was drowning under the weight of it."

She wasn't always poor. Years earlier, her family was solidly middle class. She and her husband are college grads. They had good jobs. They paid well. No longer.

They exhausted their savings. In 2012, they were homeless for six months. They relied on family and friends for help. They skipped meals.

They earn far less now than earlier. Survival is a daily struggle. Their children are aged eight, 12 and 14.

Millions of other poor Americans struggle the same way. Intolerable numbers live in crisis. Nicki feels like they do. "When you face food insecurity, it's hard to feel secure again," she says.

Feeding America's latest report is based on federal 2012 data. Nearly 50 million people are food insecure.

They eat less, skip meals, or go hungry. They suffer out of sight and mind. Children most of all. Their growing bodies need nutritious food.

Main Street Depression conditions persist. Economist Craig Gunderson studies hunger. "(F)ood insecurity rates are high," he says. "(T)ens of millions of Americans are...struggling" to get by.

Center for Hunger-Free Communities director Mariana Chilton said food stamps and other social benefit cuts combined with rising costs force families to choose between enough food and paying other expenses.

"This is a massive public health crisis, and it is a silent" one, she stresses.

Children's HealthWatch (CH) is a network of doctors and public health researchers. Data on children up to age four is collected. Around 29% of households CH tracks face growing hunger. In 2013, it was 25%.

Feeding America lists 10 states with significantly higher food insecurity than the 14.7% 2000-2012 national average. They include:

Mississippi: 20.9%

Arkansas: 19.7%

Texas: 18.4%

Alabama: 17.9%

North Carolina: 17.0%

Georgia: 16.9%

Missouri: 16.7%

Nevada: 16.6%

Ohio: 16.1%

California: 15.6

Illinois is this writer's home state. According to [No Kid Hungry](#), more than one in five state children (22.2) "face a constant struggle against hunger."

They endure what well-fed kids don't face. They're ill-nourished when they need healthy diets most. Empty bellies make concentrating harder. Classroom performance suffers.

Illness and headaches are more common. So is vulnerability to infections. Hospitalizations are more likely.

Conditions worsen annually. According to 2011 data, over 745,000 Illinois children "are at risk of hunger." They don't get enough food "to lead healthy active lives."

"More than 23 percent of (state) households with children struggled to afford enough food for themselves and their families in 2010."

Things now are worse than then. This writer lives in Chicago. The [Greater Chicago Food Depository](#) (GCFD) explained city food security.

Around "1 in 6 individuals" are affected. They don't know "when or where their next meal will be."

People struggle throughout greater Chicago. Data show high concentrations in west and south Chicago communities. Cook County's south suburbs are affected.

In Chicago's West Garfield Park, Lawndale and Austin, one in three people face food insecurity. Auburn Gresham, West Englewood, South Shore and Roseland are severely impacted.

South Chicago Harvey, Robbins and Ford Heights face 34%, 39% and 48% food insecurity rates respectively.

GCFD executive director Kate Maehr said "(o)lder adults face painful choices between paying for food and paying for medicine, or paying for food and she paying rent."

Federal budget cuts caused "more hunger," she added. Over 860,000 Cook County residents aren't sure where their next meal is coming from, she said.

Around 37% are children. About 9% are under age five. Nearly half of affected households say they're forced to choose between food and utilities.

Another 44% either buy food, pay rent, or maintain monthly mortgage payments. Employed and unemployed households face similar conditions.

So do communities nationwide. America is a let 'em eat cake society. Things aren't improving. Harder times keep getting harder..

In Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," he explained how struggling Cratchit family members struggled to get by. Ebenezer Scrooge was responsible.

On Christmas eve, dinner consisted of "one small atom of a bone upon a dish (followed by) speckled cannon-ball" pudding with a sprig of holly.

"But nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat heresy to do so," said Dickens.

Cratchits were like many others in 18th century England. They made do with meager amounts of what they had.

So do growing millions of Americans. The world's richest country doesn't care. Lump of coal harshness is policy.

Fundamental rights don't matter. Human need goes begging. Washington has other priorities.

Serving monied interests tops the list. So does waging war on humanity. Maybe destroying it to save it is planned.

Battlefields shift from one theater to another. Conflicts rage without end. America's war machine reflects madness. Death squad diplomacy eliminates non-believers.

Tyranny is a hair's breadth away. Where things end, who knows. Hungry millions worry most about empty bellies. Policymakers don't give a damn if they starve.

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Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III."

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