

NCH . NEWS . . .

NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS | 2201 P St NW | Washington, DC 20037
Phone: 202.462.4822 | Fax: 202.462.4823 | INFO@NATIONALHOMELESS.ORG | WWW.NATIONALHOMELESS.ORG

Hello,

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Bridge the Economic Gap Day

 *Kelly Fawcett NCH Intern from Oregon State University '06*

On Tuesday, September 6th, the day after Labor Day, The Universal Living Wage Campaign will sponsor Bridge the Economic Gap Day. A call for leadership in this event is being made to union and organization leaders across the country. Community groups are asked to fly banners that read, "Bridge the Economic Gap with a Universal Living Wage" on over passes during rush hour from 4:30-6:30pm. Richard Troxell is coordinating the event with the goal of stimulating the nation's energy in a call for economic justice.

The Universal Living Wage Campaign is a committee of House the Homeless. House the Homeless is based in Austin, Texas and is dedicated to rooting out the causes of homelessness in order to eliminate it. The organization believes that there are three key areas that need to be addressed in ending homelessness: they are: affordable housing, living wages, and health care. The Universal
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ending homelessness; they are: affordable housing, living wages, and health care. The Universal Living Wage Campaign was designed to bring focus to the issue of a living wage. This concern is based on the premise that every person who works forty hours a week should be able to afford housing and other basic needs in the community in which they work.

The Universal Living Wage's "formula" for bridging the economic gap is simple:

-Work a 40 hour week

-Spend no more than 30% of income on housing

-Index the minimum wage to the local cost of housing as set each year by the US Department of HUD (Housing and Urban Development) to create fair market rents.

In the United States, nearly one out of every four workers earns a wage that is too low to support a family and research indicates that today's minimum-wage workers earn one-third less than their counterparts did nearly thirty years ago. In terms of the real value of money in the year 2000, minimum-wage workers in 1968 earned \$7.92 an hour, compared to today's federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour. Although the vast majority of states meet the federal minimum wage level, some states like Oklahoma have a minimum wage of only \$2.00.

Some arguments against increasing the minimum wage or creating a universal living wage are that most employees working at this wage are teenagers living with the support of their families, and therefore do not need a wage increase to sustain them. However, two out of every three minimum-wage workers are adults. And while women make up just under half of the total work force, two out of every three adult minimum-wage workers are women with children.

Bridge the Economic Gap Day on September 6th should help to raise awareness on these issues. Non-profit, religious organizations, unions, and businesses across the country are being contacted, and already over 70 organizations in 48 states have agreed to participate. Organizations are asked to find a safe bridge or overpass on a major freeway to hang the banner from. Although the large banners cost over \$150 each along with shipping expenses, they are delivered free of cost to participating organizations. The unions and community organizations are also encouraged to contact the local media and to pass out leaflets in support of the event. The banners will fly from about 4:30-6:30pm in cities across the nation in order to reach a large amount of people during rush hour traffic.

As phone calls continue daily in an effort to have all 50 states involved, Richard Troxell is very pleased with the outcomes and the number of responses so far. He feels that the amount of interest from community groups shows how hard people are working to make the universal living wage a reality. Over 1,300 organizations have pledged support to the concept of a universal living wage, and Troxell hopes that the Bridge the Economic Gap Day will be a "coming out party" for the campaign. He thinks that this event will put the living wage on the national agenda, and draw those who are not familiar with the idea to the Universal Living Wage website.

Richard Troxell has spent countless hours organizing this event. Troxell is the director of the Universal Living Wage Campaign as well as the director of House the Homeless. After experiencing homelessness for over three years subsequent to serving in the Vietnam War, he has dedicated his life to "reaching out to others who need economic stability." He hopes that this event will not only raise awareness on the issues of poverty and economic injustice, but also bring organizations and communities together.

The Universal Living Wage website (www.universallivingwage.org) also has more information about Bridge the Economic Gap Day, including sample leaflets and a list of all of the participating organizations and cities. If you are a member of a community organization or a union and would like...bethesdahosting.com/.../397_2005...

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organizations and cities. If you are a member of a community organization or a union and would like to participate on September 6, please contact Richard Troxell directly at: rrtroxell@aol.com or (512) 796-4366. Take a stand against economic injustice and participate in Bridge the Economic Gap Day!

What you can do:

Encourage your union or community organization to participate in Bridge the Economic Gap Day. Participate in a Bridge the Economic Gap Day event in your community.

Senate Banking and Housing Committee Reject Affordable Housing Trust Fund

Kelly Fawcett NCH Intern from Oregon State University '06

Affordable housing advocates fear that the Housing Trust Fund Bill is dead after the Senate Banking, Urban Affairs, and Housing Committee failed to include a new Affordable Housing Fund in the passing of the Federal Housing Enterprise Regulatory Reform Act of 2005. The Affordable Housing Trust Fund would delegate 5% of the after tax profits of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to a fund that would support the availability of low income housing.

The passing of this bill would be a huge step forward in low-income housing development. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) estimates that the fund would generate between \$400 and \$600 million in its first year, and over \$1 billion per year in the future. Over 90% of the fund would be used annually for the "production preservation, and rehabilitation of affordable rental housing," while the remaining 10% would be designated for "home ownership activities."

Advocates contend that money would benefit people with low and extremely low incomes, and would help draw developers to poorer communities. Michael Stoops, Acting Executive Director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, feels that bills such as these will prevent many from becoming homeless, and benefit those currently experiencing homelessness by providing more opportunities for people to move out of shelters and transitional housing.

Research published by the NLIHC holds that the amount of affordable housing for low-income renters has declined significantly in the last three decades. In a study conducted in 2003, results showed that over one-third of Americans live in unaffordable or insufficient housing. The Affordable Housing Trust Fund was designed in response to the "extremely saturated" rental market, said Linda Couch of NLIHC. The bill would be the first congressional action to promote low-income housing since 1990.

Although the House Financial Services Committee passed the bill on a 65-5 vote last May, the Senate Banking, Urban Affairs, and Housing Committee failed to establish the Affordable Housing Fund in a 9-11 party line vote in late July. One major fear that brings opposition to the bill is that the two government-sponsored agencies, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, would use the fund to leverage their influence on Capitol Hill. Representative Mike Pence (R-IN), leading a group of 34 House Republicans, argues that the proposed fund works against the free market principles and basic capitalistic philosophy that our country is built on.

The primary issue that continues to divide Republicans and Democrats on the committee is the
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limits on what Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac can hold in their portfolio. Banking Committee Chair Richard Shelby's (R-AL) bill, S 190, gives the new regulator the power to control portfolio holdings to address safety and soundness. However, this is also a systemic risk as the bill lists permissible holdings. Ranking Member Paul Sarbanes (D-MD) argues that other limits proposed by this bill may adversely affect the American mortgage system.

To counter act, Senator Sarbanes submitted a substitute for Senator Shelby's bill that included an affordable housing amendment from Senator Jack Reed (D-RI). This amendment would establish the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, as well as stronger affordable housing goals for Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. The Reed amendment was voted down 11-9.

An affordable housing amendment that was introduced by Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA) strengthens Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac's existing goals, but fails to provide direct funds to support low-income housing projects. The amendment passed 11-9, again along party lines, but was objected by Senator Reed on the grounds that it did not fulfill the original affordable housing goals intended by the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

The Affordable Housing Trust Fund clearly faces opposition due to conflicting interests from the two parties in the House. However, during the Committee mark up, the majority of both Republican and Democrat Senators indicated that they were committed to working together to design an affordable housing bill that both sides could agree on. Despite their differences, committee members could concur on the fact that an increase in affordable housing is greatly needed. Although they were unable to come to an agreement, members vowed to continue to try reach a compromise through the August recess.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition has attempted to see how the compromise is progressing, but they have been unable to contact anyone on the Hill. Sheila Crowley, NLIHC President, is trying to remain hopeful. She said, "We find it unfortunate that the Senate Banking Committee failed to seize this opportunity to make a significant difference in the housing conditions of thousands of our nation's lowest income families...However, we are very optimistic that they will honor their commitment to bridge their differences and produce a good legislation that both properly regulates Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and provides new money to solve some of the nation's most pressing housing problems.

The Yellow School Bus Project: Helping Homeless Kids Get Ready for School

Yvonne Vissing, PhD

As the end of summer approaches and the first days of school draw near, most kids look forward to going shopping for new school supplies. They arrive at school wearing new shoes and clothes, with backpacks bulging with binders, new crayons, and shiny protractors slung over their shoulders. But this reality is not necessarily shared by homeless students.

Homeless children don't get mega-shopping sprees to buy markers, pencils, loose-leaf paper, and insulated lunch boxes. Parents who can't make ends meet are unable to take their kids to the mall for new polar-fleece sweaters, designer shirts or capri pants. Hand-me-downs, second-hand clothes, and recycling of last year's wardrobe are the norm. Parents may hope the school will provide the supplies students need for classroom use, but kids know better - those kids who don't have their own supplies have to borrow them or do without.

Even though homeless students may look forward to another school year as a time of new beginnings, possible opportunities, and a fresh start, even walking through the school door can be intimidating. As a result, homeless students may dread the first day of school. They may be concerned about not having the supplies teachers needed for class. If they don't have the right ruler, compass, notebooks or art supplies, they may automatically be at a disadvantage when it comes to doing the required work. It's hard enough for homeless children to get at...bethesda hosting.com/.../397_2005...

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be at a disadvantage when it comes to doing the required work. It's hard enough for homeless children to get at-home homework done, especially when they don't have access to home libraries or internet-accessible computers, but some have difficulty doing in-class work when they don't have the necessary supplies at their disposal. Concern about academic failure is only part of their dread. Homeless students may also be worried about being accepted by their peers. In a culture in which designer clothes are promoted en masse, homeless students may be embarrassed by their meager wardrobes. If students are easy targets for ridicule because of their appearance or inability to be as "prepared" as their housed, wealthier peers, they may expect a long and difficult year.

Welfare and social service assistance has been cut as numbers of homeless and needy children have skyrocketed. Charitable contributions to the needy have decreased in most communities - some people have switched their contributions to assist victims of terrorism while others have decided to only donate to a pet charity since they can't give to every worthy cause. Many people simply have less to give as their own economic futures have become precarious. During Thanksgiving time, people have been more likely to contribute coats or items for food-baskets. In December, programs like Toys For Tots have encouraged people to give toys and clothes so needy children can have a nice Christmas. While these yearly moments of philanthropic giving provide blessed relief to parents of children in need, people usually forget that one of the most important days of a child's year is that first day of school.

Goals of The Yellow School Bus Program

In order to help equip homeless children with the supplies they need in order to succeed and feel good about themselves, the Yellow School Bus - Back To School Program has been created. This program has been a joint endeavor of a Mission Board of a church in Durham, New Hampshire and the Baboosic Center for Child and Community Development.

The goal of the Yellow School Bus Program (YSBP) is simple - to provide homeless children in the community with the school supplies they need in order for them to succeed. A secondary goal is to outfit children with a few new school clothes so they can go to school properly attired and feeling good about themselves. In the giving of these gifts to the children, there is an explicit message that others in the community perceive them as smart and worthwhile. There is an implicit message that others in the community are invested in their success, and there are people who will help them.

The Yellow School Bus Program can be an effective vehicle for assisting children in need as they enter school. As a model, it can be adapted by other communities and organizations. Each community can adjust the program to meet the demands of the numbers of children who need help, as well as organizations who may be willing to be of assistance. The gifts of pencils and jackets may be of pragmatic utility. But more than that, they are symbolic gifts of expectation. As children walk into the doors of the school well-clothed and with supplies in their backpack that can be used to promote their academic success, they carry with them the expectation that this will be a good year. The expectation that they are just as good as other children, that they have just as much potential, and that they will make important contributions is a worthwhile endeavor for everyone involved.

For further information on how you can create a Yellow School Bus Program in your community, write to us at yvonne.vissing@salemstate.edu.

What You Can Do- Look into starting a Yellow School Bus Project in your community

"Bumvertising" Reinforces Negative Stereotypes

A recent advertising campaign in Seattle, Washington has attracted the attention of the media and homeless advocates alike. Benjamin Rogovy, a 2004 UW graduate has recently copyrighted the term "Bumvertising," to describe the advertising campaign he has launched for his new website. When Rogovy was faced with the high costs of advertising, he opted for the cheaper way; he began asking local panhandlers if they would hold signs advertising his website, pokerfacebook.com along with their usual signs asking for money. He pays his "employees" several dollars a day, or with beverages and snacks. They are placed at busy intersections around town, and Rogovy credits the recent increase in visitors to his site to the new advertising campaign.

While Rogovy claims that he is only trying to help his business, and those who are in need of work, sections on his website that are dedicated to "Bumvertising" contain derogatory language directed at ...bethesdahosting.com/.../397_2005...

sections on his website that are dedicated to “Bumvertising” contain derogatory language directed at those he claims to be helping. In a section dedicated to biographies of his employees, this remark is found: “Glen the angry bum, although in consideration for the position, takes no pride in sign building or maintenance, and therefore has not yet been offered a contract.” In another section of the site, Rogovy has published sections of emails he has received in response to the recent media attention being given to “Bumvertising”, here he has published many comments of praise including this one: "I just watched a news article on you and your endeavor. I think it's brilliant. The gal from whatever bleeding heart organization they were interviewing needs to re-evaluate her thinking on how you are exploiting these vagrants. I don't see her out there offering up anything. Here's wishing you the best." Randall, Seattle, WA - 8/10/05. He has also included some of the criticism that he has been receiving. The major criticism of homeless advocates is over the use of the word bum. Rogovy refutes this claim by saying:

The most prevalent complaint with Bumvertising™ is its name. People do not feel that it is appropriate. According to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, a bum is defined as:

1. A tramp; a vagrant.
2. A lazy or shiftless person, especially one who seeks to live solely by the support of others.

Without addressing the issues of laziness or shiftlessness, the second definition seems to be very much to the point. These people are hired because their full time job is asking other people for food, money, and clothing.

In a recent article from The Washington Daily, Michael Stoops, the acting executive director of NCH, is quoted as saying: “Using the word "bum" is like using the N-word to a person of color, so that further perpetuates the stereotypes,"

Perpetuating stereotypes seems to be exactly what Rogovy is doing with his site. In the section dedicated to biographies, there are many references made to alcohol and some of the “employees” are portrayed as lazy. Along with Glen, who is referred to as “the angry bum”, there is Jeff, who it is said refuses to stand while holding his sign due to a broken rib, and Daniel who will not have his contract renewed due to his lack of enthusiasm for his position. In a section dedicated to defending his idea Rogovy states:

Unfortunately, due to alcoholism, drug abuse, and mental illness many of these people have no choice but to be independent contractors, since conventional employers would shy away from them. They are in fact, too shoddy of workers to be hired at minimum wage. It does not make good business sense to pay them minimum wage, therefore they are not hired at all.

It seems that Rogovy is defending not only his own business, but also the society that gives these individuals no other choice, claiming that it would be bad business to pay them a fair wage. He is also assuming that their position is not due to lack of opportunity, but to a lack of ability or competency.

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While Rogovy can claim that he is trying to help these panhandlers by providing them with legitimate employment, his use of derogatory language and the comments on his site do much to refute this claim. If the intention is truly to help he should reconsider his tactics.

The North American Street Newspaper Association

The North American Street Newspaper Association (NASNA) held its 9th annual conference the last weekend of July in Halifax, Nova Scotia in Canada.

Representatives of the 40 street newspapers in the U.S. and Canada were in attendance. Technical assistance workshops were offered to the participants. The general membership approved a strategic plan for the organization. Mickey Hubbard, Natalie Khorochev, NCH interns, and Michael Stoops, NCH's acting executive director attended. Stoops was re-elected to the NASNA Executive Committee.

Help the Homeless Walkathon

The 18th Annual Help the Homeless Walkathon will be held on November 19th at the National Mall in DC. NCH is once again participating in this event. The walk is one of the largest fundraisers in the country that benefits organizations serving the homeless population. All registration fees and sponsorships can be donated to the organization of your choice.

Please join us for the walk and be sure to designate NCH as your beneficiary when you register. You can register online at www.helpthehomelessdc.org

If you can not be in DC on the day of the walk, please consider sponsoring a low income or homeless walker. The registration fee for the walk is \$25.00. If you are able to sponsor a walker please send a check in the amount of \$25.00 made out to Help the Homeless, and we will be sure to match your donation with a walker in need.

If you have any questions please contact Angie Mescall at AMescall@nationalhomeless.org 202-462-4822 ext 16.

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Sept. 14-16--Little Rock, Arkansas-Richard Troxell, NCH board member from Texas, and Michael Stoops, NCH's acting executive director, will do a keynote and a workshop at the annual statewide homelessness conference.

Sept. 19-20--Anchorage, Alaska-Michael Stoops will take part in the meetings of the National Network on Tobacco Prevention & Poverty and the Alaska Coalition on Housing & Homelessness.

Sept. 21-23--Greenville, South Carolina-Sue Watlov Phillips, NCH Board Treasurer, and Michael Stoops will be speaking at a statewide homelessness conference being held at Furman University.

Click [here](#) if you would like to be removed from this list.

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