

## Food First

# Fact Sheet

### Hunger, Homelessness, Poverty and Healthcare: Bush and Kerry -- Where Do They Stand?

As Democrats and Republicans debate war and terrorism, a war has been waged against the poor at home. The numbers of Americans suffering from hunger, poverty, homelessness and lack of healthcare have dramatically increased since 2000. The latest U.S. Census found (<http://www.census.gov/>) that several million more slipped into poverty and lost their healthcare insurance last year. Yet these vital issues of human security--food, housing, health care--are missing from the presidential debates, buried under headlines of war and threats of terrorism.

This fact sheet summarizes the state of the nation today and presents the candidates' statements on these issues and documents their previous actions and proposed plans for the next four years.

#### HUNGER

842 million people in the world are hungry. (1) In the United States, there are 34.9 million people who go hungry or are food insecure -- an increase of 3.9 million people since 1999. (2)

#### John Kerry

Authored legislation that created the Farmers Market Nutrition Program, which helps clients in the Women, Infants and Children Nutrition Program (WIC) buy fresh produce from farmers markets. (3)

The need to eliminate hunger in rural and urban communities is cited in the Democratic platform, but there is no plan of action.

#### George Bush

Mr. Bush believes it is not the government's role to provide these services, and is instead relying on his Armies of Compassion initiative, that would provide tax deductions for farmers and restaurants to donate food to food banks. (4)

*Our world produces more than enough food to feed its 6 billion people. Yet tens of millions are at risk of starvation, and millions more lack water fit for drinking... By widening the use of new high-yield biocrops and unleashing the power of markets, we can dramatically increase agricultural productivity and feed more people across the continent. (5)*

*George Bush*

Hunger at Home Fact Sheet: <http://www.foodfirst.org/progs/anhr/hungerhome.php>

Hunger in America: <http://www.foodfirst.org/progs/anhr/hungerinamerica.php>

Reaping What We Sow: <http://www.foodfirst.org/media/opedcs/2002/thanksgiving2002.html>

## HOMELESSNESS

About 3.5 million people in the United States are homeless, 39 percent of whom are children. (6) Families with children are among the fastest growing segment of the homeless population. (7) In 2003, the combined earnings of two full-time minimum wage workers in 48 states and the District of Columbia was not enough to afford fair market rent (the official definition of affordable is paying no more than 30 percent of income on rent). (8)

The government's main program to assist low-income families and the elderly is the Section 8 voucher program. When Section 8 was created in 1976, 400,000 vouchers were provided, allowing families to spend less than 30 percent of their income on rent. By 2003 a mere 34,000 were provided to families. (9)

### John Kerry

Opposes cuts to Section 8 voucher program, and other federal housing assistance programs. (10) Authored the Welfare Reform and Housing Act in 2002, allowing states to use Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds to provide rental assistance. (11)

Supports the HOPE VI program to revitalize public housing. (12)

*We desperately need to build more housing in this country. More working families in this country are homeless than ever before -- it's unacceptable and we must provide incentives for low to middle class families that need our help. (13)*

Senator John Kerry

Worked to raise HUD rent subsidies to match market rates and keep rent affordable. (14)

Wrote legislation establishing the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which gives need-based matching grants to states to build new rental units for low-income families. (15)

### George Bush

President Bush's 2005 budget cuts \$1.6 billion from the Section 8 voucher program, potentially edging 250,000 households out of the program -- 12.5 percent of those currently participating. (16)

The Bush administration has focused on the Zero Down Payment Initiative as a way to help families afford homes by eliminating the required 3 percent down payment. Supporters expect this initiative to benefit 150,000 families a year. Families would be charged higher insurance premiums by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) under zero down payment. (17)

True State of the Union (1998) <http://www.foodfirst.org/progs/humanrts/union.html>

## POVERTY

35.8 million people in the United States -- 12.5 percent of the population -- live below the federal poverty line. An estimated 4.3 million people slipped into poverty between 2000 and 2003. (18)  
12.9 million children currently live in poverty. (19)

### John Kerry

Supports increasing the federal minimum wage to \$7 an hour, citing that the current minimum wage is at its lowest level relative to average wages since 1949. (20)

Kerry voted for an amendment to the Higher Education Bill S.1882 that would allow welfare recipients to meet work requirements through enrollment in vocational or post-secondary education. Kerry voted for Welfare Reform in 1996, and for the replacement of federal welfare guarantee with block grants to the states. (21) For more information on how this bill slashed benefits to the needy, see "[Shredding the Safety Net](#)," a Food First Backgrounder.

*When I am president, the first thing we're gonna do is start to raise that minimum wage to \$7/hr , and allow people in America to work and get out of poverty for the work that they do....But it's not limited to minimum wage, you've gotta start talking about a living wage which so many mayors are talking about.(22)*

Senator John Kerry

### George Bush

Bush is seeking reauthorization of the 1996 Welfare Reform law , changing this law by adding new provisions which would no longer count education as a work activity, and increase the required number of work hours per week to 40. (23)

Supports the five-year lifetime limit on welfare benefits.

Proposes freezing federal funding for cash assistance programs (the largest is Temporary Aid to Needy Families, TANF) at 1996 levels.

In 2006, the Bush administration plans to cut \$177 million from the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program -- forcing an estimated 187,287 mothers out of the program. (24)

Bush cites private charities as those who should help the down-and-out in America, advocating that "armies of compassion" composed of churches and charity groups, rather than Government, should assist the poor. (25)

*The hardest job in America is to be a single mom, making \$20,000 a year. (26)*

President George Bush

## HEALTHCARE

The United States spends 14 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) on health care, more than any other country, yet one in seven Americans -- a total of 45 million people, including 8.4 million children -- lack health insurance. (27) The middle class are the largest group among the newly uninsured. (28)

Out-of-pocket healthcare costs for workers rose 50 percent between 2000 and 2003, and half of all bankruptcies, now at record levels, are attributed to health care costs. (29) Meanwhile, the cost of the ten most-used prescription drugs has increased nearly 9 percent in 2003, outpacing inflation. (30)

### John Kerry

"We must end the disgrace of being the only industrialized nation on the planet not to make health care accessible to all our citizens."

Voted to allow importation of cheaper prescription drugs from Canada. (31)

Plan to extend healthcare to 95 percent of Americans, and 99 percent of children. Families earning up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level would be covered automatically. Other families could expect to receive \$1,000 in health care premium relief.

*We're the only industrial nation in the world that doesn't yet understand health care is not a privilege for the wealthy, or the elected, or the connected, it is a right for all Americans and we're going to make it available to all Americans.* (32)

Senator John Kerry

### George Bush

Bush proposes health savings accounts (HSAs) and tax credits as the way to help families afford healthcare. The HSAs are tax-free, portable accounts to be used on routine medical expenses and are available to individuals who already have healthcare.

The new Medicare prescription drug law forces seniors to go through an HMO, PPO or other managed healthcare system for their prescription drugs. While various drug discount cards are available, each card is for specific group of prescription drugs and only one discount card is allowed per person. Participants are given a brief window to switch discount card programs, but discounts can change at any time. For low-income seniors, the government will cover a maximum of \$600 per year in drug costs. (33)

*When the government determines which drugs are covered by health insurance and which illnesses are treated, patients face delays and inflexible limits on coverage. That is a fact. Medicine works best when doctors and their patients decide what treatments to pursue.* (34)

George Bush

### Notes:

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7. Urban Institute, 2000.
8. National Low Income Housing Coalition, Out of Reach 2003: America's Housing Wage Climbs.
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10. Kerry campaign website.

11. Thomas.loc.gov
12. John Kerry, speech to the 2004 Urban League Conference, 7/22/2004.
13. Concord Monitor / WashingtonPost.com on-line Q&A Nov 7, 2003
14. HUD press release via US Newswire, 4/29/1999
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17. HUD News Release, 1/19/2004.
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20. Kerry campaign website
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22. Kerry's speech to the Rainbow/PUSH coalition, June 29, 2004.
23. Whitehouse.gov.
24. Washington Post, 5/27/2004
25. New York Times, 10/5/1999
26. Leonard, Mary. "Fight Intensifies for Votes of Women." The Boston Globe.
27. U.S.Census Bureau, Current Population Survey 2004.
28. New York Times, 11/25/2002.
29. Consumers Union, 2/25/04
30. Pat Regnier, "Myths of American Healthcare," Money Magazine, October, 23, 2003.
31. Bill S.812, 2002.
32. Kerry's speech to the Rainbow/PUSH coalition, June 29, 2004.
33. Medicare Rights Center, [www.medicarerights.org](http://www.medicarerights.org)
34. Addressing the Biotechnology Industrial Organization's (BIO) Annual Convention in Washington, D.C., June 23, 2000