

## Opportunity to Join Fight Against Poverty

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By: ROSEANN MIKOS

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Republicans. Democrats. Red states. Blue states. Conservative voters. Liberal voters. Values voters. Soccer moms. NASCAR dads. During the 2004 presidential election, the country was divided into such categories, making it one of the most polarizing elections ever. Now that the dust has settled and the red and blue bruises are beginning to heal, it is time for the nation to turn its attention to more pressing matters, such as the 110 million Americans living in or near poverty (about 73,600 in Ventura County, or 9.2% of our population based on recent census figures).

Maybe your candidate won or maybe he lost. That doesn't change the fact that while the political pundits and spin doctors were debating hanging chads and uncounted votes, low-income Americans across the country were going without dinner, sleeping in their cars, skipping medical appointments, and making gut-wrenching choices between food and medicine when they were sick.

Though the election was dominated by discussions on moral issues such as gay marriages and abortion rights, poverty was rarely mentioned. Whatever your position on these moral issues, most will agree that it is unacceptable for a single mother's cupboards to be bare, a family to sleep in their car, or for a child to not visit the doctor for regular checkups. This is the daily reality experienced by the working poor and, increasingly, the middle class.

Everywhere you turn—the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer! If the truth "be told," most of us are only a missed paycheck or a natural disaster away from becoming homeless or falling into or near poverty ourselves. In today's day and age, it can happen to almost anyone. Staff at the Moorpark Food Pantry, which provides safety net services to local Moorpark/East County people in need, report that, just in the last year, they have seen about a 20% increase in clients seeking help. Many people are asking for help for the first time in their lives.

The woman sitting next to you in church who always helps out with the bake sales could be facing bankruptcy. The waiter serving you at your favorite restaurant might have gone years without visiting a doctor because he doesn't have health insurance. The girl whose locker is next to your daughter's might eat only once a day because her mother has been out of work for months. And the boy on your son's soccer team might have to practice on the school playground because it's kind of hard to practice at home, when "home" is the inside of his parents' car.

It is clear that the November 2004 election was one of the most divisive elections in history. But now, Ventura County's Community Action Agency since 1965, the Commission on Human Concerns (CHC), is offering Ventura County residents a chance to move on and become united once again by supporting our efforts to eradicate poverty. The CHC anti-poverty mission is: *Helping people through advocacy and services which promote dignity and self-sufficiency.*

In honor of National Community Action Month, an annual celebration held in May, we are hosting two important Public Hearings in preparation for preparing our local Community Action Plan (CAP) for 2006-2007. This plan will be designed to address how we will propose to spend the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funds to best assist low-income individuals and families in Ventura County over the next two years, in cooperation with other partner agencies.

Members of the public, whether as individuals or representing organizations, especially those who have knowledge of the gaps in providing services to our low-income neighbors, are invited to participate in one or both hearings to help us gather information toward answering this question: *What assistance do you think will be needed to help low-income individuals and families to become more self-sufficient in the years 2006-2007?* The two hearings are scheduled as follows, beginning with international food tasting, followed by a facilitated hearing:

- Wed., May 11, 2005 at 5:30 p.m. at *Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation*, 11011 Azahar Street, Saticoy, CA 93004
- Tue., May 17, 2005 at 5:30 p.m. at *United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW)*, 816 Camarillo Springs Rd., Camarillo, CA 93012

On behalf of the entire CHC Board of Directors, our dedicated staff, and our low-income Ventura County neighbors, I strongly encourage everyone to come out and share your insights so that you can help us to continue to help low-income residents change their lives. You'll also learn about our programs and success stories and ways you can help us to fight poverty in Ventura County.

This event is just one of many being held by Community Action Agencies across the country in honor of National Community Action Month. Our national organization, the Community Action Partnership, created National Community Action Month to pay tribute to the poverty-fighting efforts of Community Action Agencies across the country.

This year's theme is unity because unity is essential to all aspect of our lives, including fighting poverty. Poverty knows no boundaries and increasingly, any one of us could fall into its grasp. We need to stand tall and strong together against this looming threat.

Republicans. Democrats. Red states. Blue states. Conservative voters. Liberal voters. Values voters. Soccer moms. NASCAR dads. Let's make an effort to relinquish these labels and unite under one common theme—Americans who are working together to fight poverty.

*Dr. Roseann Mikos, at [rmikos@bigplanet.com](mailto:rmikos@bigplanet.com), serves as Board Chairperson of the Ventura County Commission on Human Concerns, representing the 4<sup>th</sup> Supervisory District as a Public Member. She is also a Moorpark City Councilmember.*