Some numbers are really scary! Some numbers make me angry!

By Al Gini
October 9, 2012

Even though we are in the second full year of recovery from the stunning financial effects of the 2008 Recession, according to a recently issued Census Bureau report, the overall National Rate of poverty is a staggering 15 percent, and national median income (the point on the income scale where half earn more and half earn less) has declined by 1.5 percent.

When you translate these percentages into real numbers the issue becomes even more alarming. The national household median income is $50,054 and in Chicago it is $43,628, a drop of 4.7 percent since 2010. The national standard for poverty is an annual income of $23,021 or lower for a family of four. That means that the national poverty rate is 15 percent or 47,123,889 people, and the Chicago poverty rate is 19.7 percent or 261,400 people.

Aristotle has suggested that abstract numbers put no one in a passion, unless of course they apply to you! In, arguably, the richest nation in the world — in a nation built on the ethos of “hard work” and the mythology of “progress and well-being” — to be poor, to be without, to be economically disenfranchised constitutes a crushing blow to one’s sense of identity and self-worth. Moreover, to be at the bottom of the economic ladder is to be trapped into a life of limited options and opportunities.

Unfortunately, I have no political or economic remedies for that problem. My comments here are only the angry musings of someone who is philosophically troubled by these statistics and numbers. It bothers me deeply that as a nation we can simultaneously be engaged in foreign wars, nation building, feeding the hungry of the world, and trying to alleviate the poverty of others, but we do not do enough to be of help to our own. These figures are reason for public anger and embarrassment. That 15 percent of us live in poverty is a cancer on the body politic of this nation.

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