



Editorial

March 23, 2008, 10:57PM

Poor score

The most impoverished states have congressional delegations most opposed to anti-poverty bills.

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Texas has many claims to fame and much to recommend it. But among the Lone Star State's shames is its residents' high rate of poverty and the deprivations — from hunger to illiteracy to a lack of adequate health care — that go along with being poor. But rather than working in Congress to lift impoverished Texans into the middle class, the members of the Texas delegation in Congress were among the nation's least likely to support anti-poverty programs.

That's the conclusion of a freshly released report by the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. The national analysis found that the congressional delegations of Texas, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Kentucky and Arizona — all states with relatively high levels of poverty — generally received low marks when it came to voting for measures that could help poor people. These states, the study researchers found, suffered the highest rates of poverty.

The senators' and representatives' 2007 voting records were examined with regard to 14 poverty-related bills in the Senate and 15 in the House. The bills included proposals on affordable housing, health care, education, labor, tax policy and immigrants' rights, according to "The 2007 Poverty Scorecard: Rating Members of Congress."

Officials at the Shriver Center make the case that Americans in poor states are good at giving their time and money to address the effects of poverty. Through direct volunteerism and commitment to nonprofit work and religious outreach, they conduct food and clothing drives, minister to the sick, the troubled and the homeless, coach and tutor disadvantaged youth and perform millions of small acts of kindness for those who do not have the resources to help themselves. But, Center officials said, their leaders in Washington are not doing enough to eradicate the root causes of poverty.

"Poverty is everywhere in America, but it is interesting that in states with the highest concentrations of poverty, the congressional delegations seem least interested in supporting initiatives that fight poverty," John Bouman, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law president, said.

The Poverty Scorecard assigned letter grades to each senator and House member based on votes on more than a dozen critical pieces of legislation. Those included the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007, the 2008 Congressional Budget Resolution, the College Cost Reduction and Access Act, Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2007, the Gulf Coast Hurricane Housing Recovery Act of 2007, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2007, the Earned Income Tax Credit Amendment, and the DREAM Act, among others.

In Texas, the scores diverged along party lines. U.S. Sens. John Cornyn and Kay Bailey Hutchison, Republicans, scored D's, as did U.S. Rep. Kevin Brady, R-The Woodlands. U.S. Rep. John Culberson, R-Houston, received an F-. Rep. Al Green, Sheila Jackson Lee and Gene Green, all Houston Democrats, were graded A+. The full report, along with Texas congressional members' letter grades and votes on individual issues can be found at www.povertylaw.org.

To be fair, any organization can cherry-pick lawmakers' votes to "prove" just about any preconceived notion and support almost any agenda. Nevertheless, the Shriver Center's score card is useful for voters interested in relieving poverty to know how their representatives cast their ballots on a myriad of poverty-related issues.

No one has to accept the center's results at face value, but the scorecard does provide a wealth of information that can be put to good use by anyone who believes Texans ought to do a better job of reducing the great poverty in our midst.

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snorbert wrote:

It could just be that the conservative voters in these states recognize how inefficient, wasteful and full of abuse government sponsored welfare is. Just maybe it is better for the people themselves to open up their pocketbooks and give so that at least they can pick the organizations they feel deserve their support.

3/24/2008 8:41 AM CDT

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crowk49 wrote:

The poor should move to states with a better record, please! Or get a job, or get an education then a job. If they decide to leave please take Sheila Jackson. Then she can give away somebody else's money.

3/24/2008 8:06 AM CDT

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DanMan wrote:

What a bunch of BS. As usual a study to show that conservative ideals are evil and liberal policies are vituous. This is a regurgitation of the same tripe that pushes our nation into deeper socialism. Say it like you mean it Chron, freedom to your ilk means never having to be responsible for anything.

3/24/2008 6:41 AM CDT

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