Census Data Shows That Ending Poverty is Possible — But Congress Needs to Take Action

By: [YOUR NAME]

During this hectic election season, it’s easy for yet another set of data to get overshadowed — but here is one we should all be paying attention to.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, poverty actually went *down* last year, and federal anti-poverty programs are making a difference. For example, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) lifted 9.2 millionAmericans out of poverty in 2015. So we should start celebrating, right? Well, not so fast.

The reality is that more than 43 million Americans still live at or below the poverty line. That’s almost one in five children living in poverty in one of the richest countries in the world. That’s still a moral outrage if there ever was one. And it’s a topic that mostly been missing from the current presidential campaign. So where do we go from here?

We can start by expanding and strengthening the EITC, one of our most effective anti-poverty programs that also happens to enjoy wide bipartisan support. The EITC allows low-income workers like returning veterans, farm workers, janitors, and teaching assistants to keep more of what they earn. It is not a “handout,” and only people who work can get it. In turn, recipients use their refund at local businesses and are able to pay for essentials like food, clothes, and transportation to and from their jobs. The EITC has long-term benefits as well: children of recipients are more likely to go to college and earn more as adults.

Currently, though, workers without kids at home and young workers below age 25 are almost entirely excluded from the EITC. This doesn’t make sense, but we can do something about it. Right now, there are proposals on the table — including from both President Obama and House Speaker Paul Ryan — to lower the eligibility age for the EITC and to increase what’s available to workers without kids. We will have a new Congress in 2017, and they should waste no time taking up these proposals and sending them to the new president’s desk. That way, when next year’s Census data is released, we will be one step closer to actually *ending* poverty in America.

I think we can agree that anyone who’s willing to work hard should not only be able to pay for basic necessities, but also have a shot at a brighter future. And that’s exactly what expanding the EITC will do.