



Written by [John Larabell](#) on October 31, 2012

Enough Spent on Welfare in 2011 to Give Every Poor Household Nearly \$60,000

According to an October 16 [memorandum prepared by the Congressional Research Service](#) (CRS) for the Senate Budget Committee, the federal government spent \$746 billion on means-tested welfare programs in 2011. As the [U.S. Census Bureau notes](#), there were 16.8 million households living below the poverty level in America in 2011. In other words, if the federal government were to give this money directly to the impoverished households, all 16.8 million households would have received over \$44,000. This is double the [2011 federal poverty rate](#) of \$22,350 for a family of four, and nearly double the [2012 poverty rate](#) of \$23,050 for a family of four.



Furthermore, [according to calculations](#) by Senate Budget Committee Ranking Member Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), the states contributed roughly an additional \$280 billion to federal means-tested welfare programs, bringing total welfare spending to nearly \$1 trillion in 2011. This is enough money to send every U.S. household living below the poverty level a check for nearly \$60,000. As alarming as this seems, these numbers do not tell the whole story. As noted by [CNS News.com](#),

This federal welfare spending does not include programs such as Medicare and Social Security, because they are not means-tested programs. Means-tested programs are those that only pay out benefits to people whose incomes fall below a certain threshold, such as food stamps, traditional cash welfare, and Medicaid.

In other words, if the government were to discontinue its myriad federal welfare programs, such as housing vouchers, food stamps, and Medicaid, and instead just wrote every poor household a check, it would nearly quadruple their income: increasing it from at most \$23,000 per year to nearly \$83,000 per year.

Clearly those American households with incomes below the federal poverty level are not getting a majority of these welfare dollars, or poverty in this nation would cease to exist. On the contrary, according to [U.S. Census Bureau statistics](#), poverty levels in America have remained relatively constant for the past 60 years or so, despite the declaration of the so-called “War on Poverty” in 1964. To the detriment of the poor, the “welfare” money confiscated from those above the poverty level is mostly consumed by the burgeoning federal bureaucracy that facilitates the programs. Obviously if the intent of wealth redistribution were really to help the poor, as is often stated, it has been a colossal failure. The money is, to a large extent, “redistributed” into the government.

Arguments over the effectiveness of government welfare and the “War on Poverty” aside, federal welfare programs are not constitutional and should not even exist in the first place. Confiscation of one



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group's wealth and giving it to another is not one of the enumerated powers given to the federal government. Some may point out that the federal government is given the power in [Article I section 8](#) of the Constitution to "lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts, and Excises, to ... promote the general welfare of the United States," and this phrase has been the subject of much contention. But the [Constitution's "general welfare clause"](#) refers to the purpose for which taxes are collected; it was not intended to be an open-ended statement for Congress to pass whatever legislation it deemed as promoting the general welfare. If that were the case, then it would have made no sense for the Founding Fathers to enumerate the specific powers the various branches of government are constitutionally allowed to exercise. As Thomas Jefferson observed in 1817, Congress does not possess "unlimited powers to provide for the general welfare, but were restrained to those specifically enumerated."

As the situation stands today, nearly \$1 trillion of hard-working Americans' money is being spent ostensibly to "help the poor," but ends up helping the government bureaucracy instead. If these welfare programs were ended, the federal budget deficit would be nearly eliminated. This in itself is a major reason to end "welfare" spending. As for the poor, getting charity out of the hands of wasteful bureaucrats and back into the private economy would likely help many more people. Plus, knowing that the Nanny State will not come to the rescue will encourage people to work toward more self-sufficiency. It is imperative that liberty-minded Americans vote for Congressmen who will adhere to the Constitution and work to end the government boondoggle of the "War on Poverty."



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