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Census Data Shows Soaring Poverty Rate in Oklahoma:
Current Economy Continuing to Leave Many Behind

(Tulsa): New data released today by the U.S. Census Bureau reveals an alarming increase in the number of Oklahomans living in poverty. Oklahoma's poverty rate hit 15.4% for the period of 2005-6, a sharp increase of 2.2% from last year, and its highest level in over a decade.

For the second straight year, Oklahoma experienced a steep rise in the number and percentage of its population living below the poverty line. The Census Bureau's Current Population Survey found that 15.4% of Oklahomans lived in poverty over the period of 2005-06, up from 13.2% in 2004-05 and 11.8% in 2003-04. This translates to 537,000 Oklahomans in poverty for the period 2005-06 - which in 2006 was \$20,000 for a family of four - up from 406,500 in 2003-04. Oklahoma's climbing poverty rate stands in contrast to the national trend, where the poverty rate has declined modestly the past two years.

"These numbers should sound the alarm that our economy, while continuing to show signs of overall strength, is leaving far too many Oklahomans behind," said David Blatt, Director of Public Policy for Community Action Project, a Tulsa-based anti-poverty agency. "We hope that these new numbers will encourage state policymakers to ask some tough questions about why families are failing to earn a decent living and will lead to an aggressive effort to bolster assistance and expand opportunities for low- and moderate-income families," Blatt commented.

County-level data from a second national survey reveals that Oklahoma County is suffering the worst concentration of poverty of the state's metropolitan counties, with 22.1% of the county's residents falling below the poverty line in 2006.

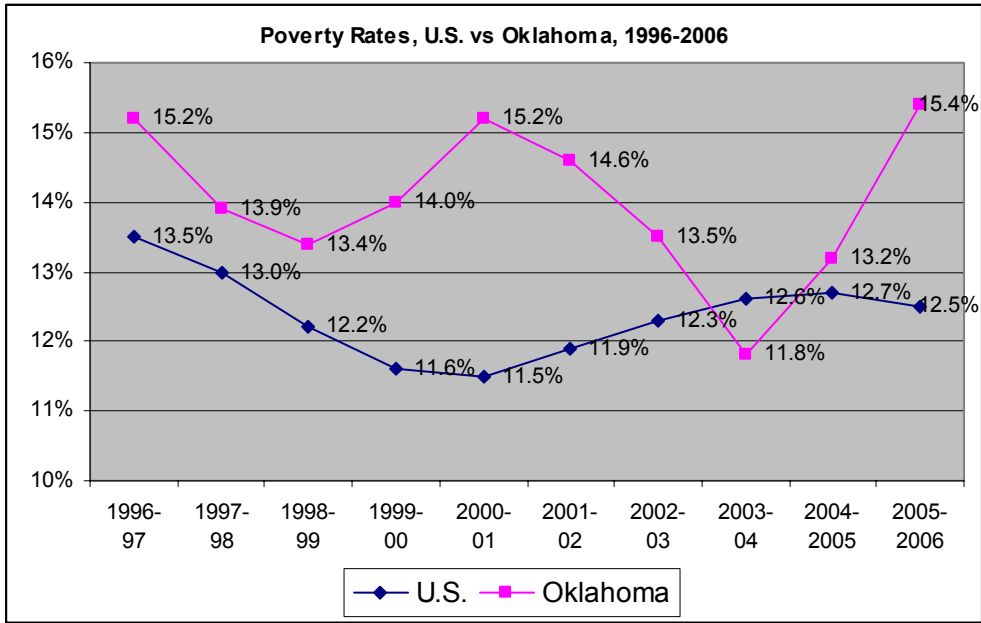
Median household income in Oklahoma in 2006 was \$38,276, which is \$10,175, or 21% below the national median household income. Median household income rose by a statistically insignificant \$675 compared to 2005.

The Census Bureau today also released data on health insurance coverage revealing that an average of 650,000 Oklahomans, or 18.7%, were without health insurance for the period from 2004-06. This was down slightly from the previous average of 19.0% uninsured from 2003-05 reported last year, but still leaves Oklahoma with the 6th highest rate of uninsured among the states. Nationally, the uninsured rate jumped from 15.3% in 2005 to 15.8% in 2006, with 47 million Americans now lacking health insurance.

"Being without health insurance leaves families one medical emergency away from falling into poverty," Blatt noted. "It is now especially urgent that the President and Congress find a way to reach agreement on expanding the State Children's Health Insurance Program to avoid even more children being left without access to health care."

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FIGURE 1: Comparison of 2-Year Poverty Rates for Oklahoma and the United States, 1996-97 to 2005-06 (source: Current Population Survey)



Poverty Levels by County Metropolitan Counties, 2006	
Oklahoma Co.	22.1%
Creek	21.1%
Muskogee	18.4%
Pottawotamie	18.4%
Comanche	17.4%
Tulsa	16.2%
Wagoner	14.6%
Cleveland	13.8%
Rogers	10.4%
Canadian	7.1%
State	17.0%

Source: American Community Survey

Community Action Project (CAP) is a Tulsa-based comprehensive anti-poverty agency whose mission is to help individuals and families in need achieve self-sufficiency. CAP's public policy department aims to promote policies that will benefit low- and moderate-income Oklahomans through research, education and advocacy.
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