



MEDIA RELEASE

Contact: David Blatt, Director of Policy
Cell: (918) 859-8747

Census Report Shows Progress on Poverty and Income, But Many Oklahomans “Left Off the Boat” of Prosperity

(Oklahoma City, August 26, 2008): Even while Oklahoma’s overall economy continued to prosper, 557,000 Oklahomans, or 15.9%, lived in poverty in 2007, according to newly-released figures from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey. This is a decline from the 17.0% who were living in poverty in 2006. However, both rates are higher than in 2000 at the peak of the last economic recovery. The poverty level in 2007 was \$20,650 for a family of four.

“These numbers remind us that while the rising tide of energy prices has been lifting the Oklahoma economy, many families have not managed to make it onto the boat of prosperity,” said Matt Guillory, Executive Director of Oklahoma Policy Institute, a state policy organization based in Oklahoma City. “Unfortunately, it is these low-income families that are facing the hardest times managing recent steep rises in the price of food, gas and utilities.”

The poverty rate in Oklahoma remained well above the national average of 13.0% in 2007. Nationally, the American Community Survey showed a 0.3% decline in the poverty rate, with 38.0 million Americans in poverty in 2007.

Oklahoma’s poverty rate for children also dipped in 2007, to 22.1%, while nationally, 17.6% of children lived in poverty. “We need to remember that poverty can do terrible thing to kids,” stated Anne Roberts, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Institute of Child Advocacy. “It can leave them hungry, poorly clothed and susceptible to a host of other stressors, such as poor health and safety. All the other risk factors that make children vulnerable are exacerbated by poverty.”

The report found that median household income in Oklahoma to be \$41,567, a statistically significant increase of \$1,802 compared to 2006. Oklahoma’s median household income is now \$9,173, or 18%, below the national median household income and ranks 43rd in the nation.

“While there is genuinely good news here, our poverty rates remain above the national average and where they were at the start of this last economic cycle,” said David Blatt, OK Policy’s Director of Policy. “We hope these new numbers will call renewed attention to the persistence of substantial poverty in Oklahoma and spark a renewed effort to provide immediate support and expand long-term opportunities for the most vulnerable segments of our population,”.

The Census Bureau also released new data on health insurance coverage revealing that an average of 646,000 Oklahomans, or 18.4%, was without health insurance over the two-year period from 2006-07. This is statistically unchanged from the previous average of 18.5% from 2004-2005, and leaves Oklahoma with the 8th highest rate of uninsured among the states. Nationally, the uninsured rate declined from 15.8% in 2006 to 15.3% in 2007, with 47 million Americans remaining without health insurance.

“Oklahoma’s high uninsured rates and high poverty rates are intertwined. Being without health insurance leaves families one medical emergency away from falling into poverty,” Guillory noted. “In the coming year, developing creative new approaches to the crisis of the uninsured needs to be a top priority of leaders both in Washington and Oklahoma City”.

--30--

Oklahoma Policy Institute is a new state policy organization committed to advancing policies aimed at promoting fiscal responsibility, expanding economic opportunity and reducing poverty. For additional information and analysis go to our website at: www.okpolicy.org

Figure 1: Comparison of Overall Poverty Rates for Oklahoma and the U.S., 2000 - 2007

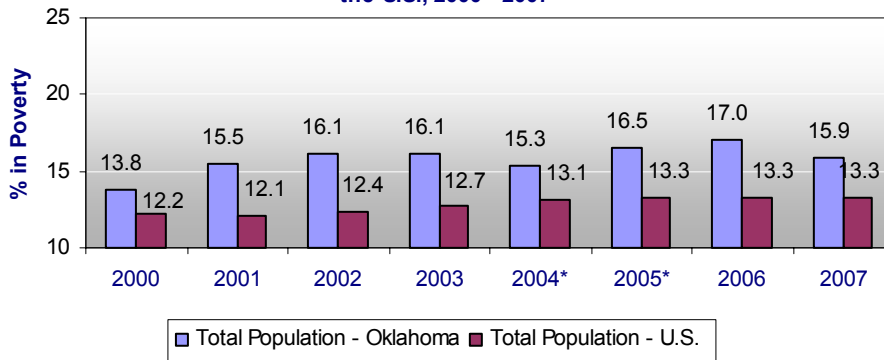
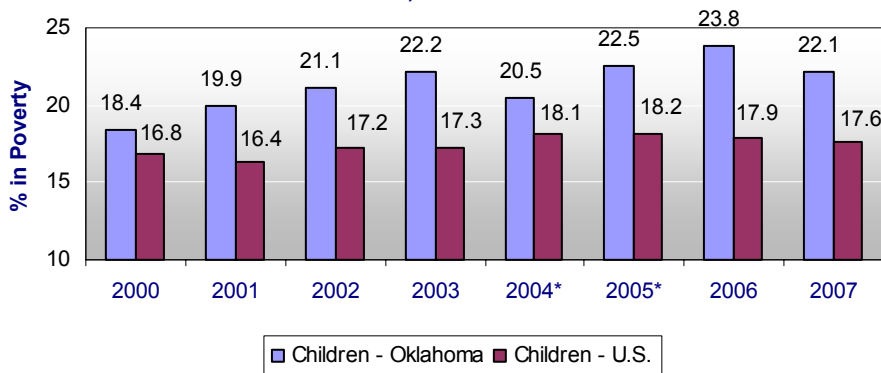


Figure 2: Comparison of Child Poverty Rates for Oklahoma and the U.S., 2000-2007



*Beginning in 2006 the Census Bureau adopted a methodology change which makes short-term comparisons between years immediately before and after the 2006 change potentially unreliable.