

Article 5.

Gardens help provide needed vegetables for pantries

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The Impressionist painters would be proud of our vegetables' colors, harvested from the Calvary Food Pantry's gardens by Audrey and Ken Mochel. Stop by the pantry and see these bright splashes made by their efforts. Reds for tomatoes, oranges for peppers, yellow for squash, as vividly colored as any rainbow. All vegetables from the gardens go to feed hungry people. These are the Mochels' volunteer gift to Auburn. The gardens are in their fifth year and producing \$13,000 worth of vegetables that families can't afford with their daily budget because vegetables are a luxury and expensive! We set up the gardens to feed the hungriest individuals and families in Auburn and we have succeeded beyond our initial expectation.

I am so proud of this town's commitment to the gardens' mission, completed only by the heroic sweat of the Mochels, now gathering their crop, with their band of hearty volunteers. Furthermore, when all is harvested, we share our crops with the other pantries. All three of us are very proud of our labors, done with love and a sense of promise and fulfillment. I state my No. 1 challenge to the residents of Auburn, a town of history and faith, is to find anyone else in the country that does what the Mochels do! I doubt there are any equals anywhere in the United States!

Come by and visit and see a sample of our hard work. Even you, the thoughtless individual, who in my presence said, "Feed the hungry? Tell me why don't they get a job?" I would love to have explained that most of my families have a job; they just can't afford the food. But he ran away. Coward! What is it with this simplistic approach by some Americans to summarize a complicated and deeply divided issue where education, available jobs in Auburn, specialized skills of county workers who are pink-slipped because of the sequester, the displaced and foreclosed, the infirm, the sick, are all relevant to us here at the pantry. Within a heartbeat any person can become hungry because of issues, not because they are unwilling to work.

So I submit another challenge (No. 2) to everyone who thinks a job takes hunger away, especially political men or women in service to the people of Auburn, the county, the state, the country:

I will give anyone, and I mean anyone, a budget from one of my approximately 200-plus families we feed each month. The challenge is that you live on this budget for a month.

WANT TO BET YOU CAN'T DO IT? Yet my families do, month in and out, all year long. They are challenged daily to feed their children, even as they work.

My pantry at least attempts to give support and tries to help and put in place some illusion of a safety net. This takes the place of the \$40 billion that Congress is taking away Nov. 1. Our families understood a government for the people included a safety net that is no longer there. (I am relieved, though, that school is now open and children, fed in the summer by various Auburn food programs, will be served breakfast and lunch. No child should go hungry. This is America, after all, not a third-world country.) The Mochels, my team of volunteers and I share what we can as righteous individuals but we can't help when self-serving politicians take \$10 dollars a month out of the working poors' mouths starting in November with an overhaul of food stamps, now called SNAP. Yes, it is easier to fund fighter jets, visible signs of achievement, than feed the hungry in this land. After all, there are no visible signs of hunger, just quiet despair. Furthermore, you talk show hosts, please note there will always be crooks, charlatans and others who take advantage of the system but they are only 1 percent of those who need help. (I quote from several government statistics.) So what about the 97 percent who work hard each day and can't make ends meet? Did you see the New York Times article last week of the working guy who goes into hills, in the South, and shoots rabbits and squirrels to put food in his children's mouths? One has to do what you have to do to feed your family.

Finally, I can only say to that "get a job" individual whose simplistic solutions for these horrific problems: your rationale will only increase the odds that there will be many more hungry people after Nov. 1, not less. You didn't think it all out, did you?

So, again, I send a challenge to anyone: individuals or politicians who think like that "get a job" individual. Can you take a budget, from a working poor family, and feed yourself similarly on what they do, for a month!? I bet no one will take up the challenge because they can't dot it! I bet it will come down to a win: Hungry People 1, Politicians and "get a job" individuals 0, but at what costs?

But, I still dare anyone to try.

Next month: Captain Jack and his Pirate ship!