

TOWN HALL MEETING ON ECONOMIC CRISIS  
12/9/08

I. Intro. & welcome to a TOWN HALL MEETING ON THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

Presented by Northeast Ohio AFSC on the eve of the 60th anniversary of the UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, back when the U.N. was in its infancy.

This forum is part of the national "Economic Crisis Week of Action" called by USAction. ANY CANNED GOODS OR MONETARY DONATIONS WILL BE GLADLY ACCEPTED AND FORWARDED TO THE AKRON AREA FOODBANK

II. Several goals or purposes of tonight's program:

1st to present a panel discussion of the current economic mess and how it's impacting various constituencies in the area

2nd to break up into small groups to begin discussing a local action plan to support the real needs of our community

3rd to bring back to the floor a summary of the small group discussions

4<sup>th</sup> to hear how the economic crisis is impacting you the audience

PANELISTS tonight will be John Fuller of the African United Front/ Effie Stewart of the United Streets Block Club/ and John Wagner of the Tri-County Council, AFL-CIO  
We thank them for volunteering their services and input tonight.

Right now there's a lot of PAIN being felt within this and most other communities throughout this country. In life, often times personal pain can be a catalyst for personal change and growth. Likewise collective pain, if channeled correctly, can be a positive force for growth and change within our society. While we can't underestimate or downplay the economic hardships being felt, even in places you don't expect and which have never felt it before, what we can do is to openly discuss it and to begin to ask the hard questions we need to ask to address the basic human needs as outlined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Folks, right now the economic pain is everywhere:

- it's in our neighborhoods which are deteriorating
- it's in our individual homes, which is straining families and relationships,
- it's in the unemployment lines
- it's in the homeless shelters
- it's on the streets
- it's within the social support network
- it's with our returning veterans

Right now its time to collect the pain, process it, focus it, then channel it back towards our institutions to demand positive change that addresses both human rights and human needs. It's an opportunity to lay a new framework for a more just economic model where people trump profit-at-any-cost.

In the past several months we've herd the phrase "too big to fail" over and over again. For those corporations they've been referring to, quite frankly they have already have failed, largely out of greed, fueled by a government complicit by ignoring common sense regulations. The only thing really too big to fail is the decency and dignity of We The People performing honest work for the betterment of our families and communities.

Also, with the failure of all these corporations who were too big to fail, perhaps we should be looking into a honeycomb of more sustainable, local or regionally based economies with less demand on the energy grid. In a shrinking world we need to place value in how well a person conserves rather than just how much we can consume.

I've also heard a lot of talk about "socialism" lately. Actually I've witnessed it with the taxpayer bailout of the Savings and Loan Industry in the 1980's. Today we're witnessing it again, performed in the last throes of a "conservative" Republican Administration, borrowing

from taxpayers and their children to prop up wealthy Wall Street corporate oligarchs. It's more pathetic than ironic to witness the working, taxpaying middle class, the very people losing their homes, saving all those golden corporate behinds.

Above and beyond the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, our Constitution, one of the greatest documents ever written, guarantees us some additional rights: the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness".

With that said, it's time to ask some hard questions...

Can a person live, be free and pursue happiness if he or she has no access to health care? Is access to health care a right or simply another commodity to be marketed much like magazine subscriptions and only available to those who can afford to pay?

Was the creation of our interstate highway system a form of government socialism? Can you imagine how it would look if thrown together by a hodgepodge of local, for-profit corporations? How efficient would it be if every on-ramp had a toll booth? How many could afford to use it?

Likewise, how many people does it take before we acknowledge that the health care delivery system in this country is broken, then finally fix it? 46 million? 60 million? 100 million?

Is clean water a basic necessity of life and owned by all, or just another market to be cornered?

In the midst of a campus building boom, why has higher education become unaffordable for most?

Where is the "ground up" government program to keep people in their homes, fixing them up, insulating them to conserve energy, strengthening neighborhoods and communities and thus bailing out the banks not by throwing tax money at them but rather by a massive resumption of monthly mortgage payments?

Finally, if recessions happen when too much money is concentrated in too few hands, shouldn't the solution to this economic crisis be focused on the basic human needs of Main Street, the side streets and all the back streets which have been ignored for far too long? Let's use this forum tonight as the first step in pushing for economic changes that do just that.