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Cost of Being Poor Increasing

IF the official poverty level keeps on rising, all of us may be on welfare before we even start paying on the national debt.

The U.S. Labor Dept. has declared that an urban family of four that has an income of only \$4,550 or less is poor and its members are eligible for federal manpower training programs.

Young people who have been insulated from premature work by child labor laws and from actual poverty by minimum wage laws may find it hard to realize, but their grandparents remember when an income of \$4,550 was a level of affluence rather than a measure of indigence.

Folks didn't need a government agency before World War II to make a study and tell them that they were poor. Our intuition told us that we were poor if we didn't have enough groceries, if we wore patches on our patches, and if we couldn't buy shingles to fix the leaky roof.

These days it takes a lot more aerated dollars just to become needy. Inflation has hit everything, and even a zero has to be bigger just to be noticed.

The high cost of being poor never had more meaning than it does at present. Families who must buy on credit are hit hard by high interest rates and carrying charges. Those who are not poor can get that way pretty fast.

It is tragic that the tornadic economy which provides higher incomes for working people without increasing their buying power also reduces the livelihood of the retired, the dependent, and the poor in a downward spiral that drags increasing numbers of self-reliant people into welfare offices every year.

The Labor Dept. made another study on how much it takes to live and not be poor. It covered 40 areas but overlooked Oklahoma. Closest reporting point is Dallas, where the economists calculated that in 1973, an urban family of four on a minimum budget would need \$7,494, before taxes. Add 6 per cent more for 1974 inflation.

If the same sized family wanted a few luxuries, figure on an income of \$11,408. An upper income budget was defined as \$16,473, but native Texans

and Oklahoma visitors might argue about whether that would provide luxury living in the Metroplex.

Even so, Dallas was one of the cheaper places on the list. If you wanted to eat and keep warm in Anchorage, Alaska, the income range was from \$12,010 as a minimum, up to \$23,011.

It appears that the upper level of poverty (\$4,550 a year) is increasing faster than the lower level of affluence (\$7,494), and that is narrowing the spread between the rich and the poor. There may be a study on those families in between somewhere, but it hasn't shown up yet. Maybe they have three or six members and upset the statistics for a typical urban family of four.

No remedy for inflation is in sight, and there is room to doubt whether officials want it slowed down or stopped. After all, it is bringing everybody into higher tax brackets to provide more money for appropriations and making more people dependent on government help. That's a pretty good election campaign platform.