**Spotlight on Mitt Romney and the “Very Poor”**

- **President Obama is committed to getting Americans back to work.** The President pushed hard for the $787 billion in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding, which cushioned the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression and laid a new foundation for economic growth. The stimulus-created jobs have helped expand health care, and support unemployed families and education funding. In fact, the stimulus package saved more than 300,000 educators’ jobs and represented the single largest federal investment in public education in history. President Obama also has continually pushed Congress to cut payroll taxes and extend unemployment insurance. He continues to push Congress to pass the American Jobs Act to keep educators in the classroom, invest in infrastructure, expand job skills training, and extend unemployment benefits. This week, the President unveiled a plan to help responsible homeowners and support a housing market recovery.

- **Mitt Romney is ‘not concerned about the very poor.’** This statement, made on CNN this week, was the latest in a string of gaffes which point to Romney’s lack of concern for poorer Americans – a PR problem for Romney, one of the richest candidates in American history. Saying “we have a safety net,” Romney dismissed the idea that he should focus on helping poorer Americans. When pressed to clarify his remark, Romney said “We will hear from the Democrat party, the plight of the poor ... You can focus on the very poor, that’s not my focus ... The middle income Americans, they’re the folks that are really struggling right now and they need someone that can help get this economy going for them.” According to Bloomberg News, more than 20 million Americans meet the Census Bureau’s definition of “very poor,” meaning an annual household income of less than $11,057 per year for a family of four. Romney has now backed away from this statement, saying he “misspoke.”

- **Gingrich attacks Romney’s reliance on the ‘safety net.’** “I really believe we should care about the very poor unlike Gov. Romney,” Gingrich tweeted after Romney’s statement. Gingrich has taken umbrage with Romney’s apparent faith in the safety net. “What the poor need is a trampoline, so that they can spring up...So I’m for replacing the safety net with a trampoline,” said Gingrich. Gingrich, who has been a foe of support programs for the poor since his days in the House of Representatives, has touted reforms repeatedly on the campaign trail. Gingrich has sparked controversy over some of these statements, which critics have argued contained racially malevolent language. Romney’s recent gaffes provide Gingrich the opportunity to say “unlike Governor Romney, I really care about making sure that, in fact, every person has the right to pursue happiness.”

- **Santorum accuses Romney of a lack of compassion.** “I think it shows a callousness on the part of Governor Romney,” said Santorum. “I mean this is a situation where we’re talking about people who are in the margins of society and we better care about them,” Santorum echoed Gingrich’s conservative rebuke to Romney, denouncing Romney’s focus on social programs. “To suggest that all we need to do is worry about the social safety net...No...NO! ...You don’t focus on the social safety net, you focus on how you create a ladder of success for the very poor. It shows that Governor Romney looks at people...in this case ‘the poor’...differently. Like being very poor is a disability.”

**NEA Believes**

- Assuming safety nets are taking care of America’s poor is irresponsible. More than 46 million Americans live in poverty. In addition, more than 40 percent of American children live in poverty, and attend the nation’s most under-resourced schools.

- America’s working families need more than a passing glance. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reports that poverty figures could have been worse and may skyrocket soon without the continued assistance of unemployment benefits, the Making Work Pay tax credit, and expansions for the child tax credit, earned income tax credit, and supplemental nutrition assistance programs.

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5 “Help for Homeowners,” *WhiteHouse.gov*.
6 Mitt Romney: middle income Americans are focus, not very poor, *CNN*, 2/1/2012
7 Romney: I misspoke on ‘very poor’, *Politico*, 2/2/2012
8 Newt Gingrich: I care about poor people, *CBS*, 2/2/2012
9 Newt Gingrich: I care about poor people, *CBS*, 2/2/2012
10 Newt Gingrich: I care about poor people, *CBS*, 2/2/2012
11 Santorum On KMOX: “Very Poor” Remark Reveals Romney’s “Callousness”, *CBS*, 2/2/2012
12 Santorum On KMOX: “Very Poor” Remark Reveals Romney’s “Callousness”, *CBS*, 2/2/2012