

Chairman Johnson Opening Statement
“Renewing Communities and Providing Opportunities Through Innovative Solutions to Poverty”

Wednesday, June 22, 2016

As submitted for the record:

Good morning and welcome.

Our mission for this committee is to enhance the economic and national security of America. While we are always mindful of the national security threats we face, this committee also has a unique responsibility to ensure economic opportunity for Americans, especially those who are struggling to find work and provide for themselves and their families.

Too often in Washington, politicians see a problem and the first question they ask is, “What more can we do?” when they should be asking, “What is already being done and is it working?” As Ranking Member Carper has said, we need to find out what works and do more of it.

We are here today to examine how community leaders across America are finding innovative solutions to address needs and provide opportunities for employment in their communities.

In my travels across Wisconsin, manufacturers and small business owners frequently complain to me that they are looking to hire and expand their workforces, but cannot find qualified candidates. How can this be when we continue to spend billions of taxpayer dollars providing assistance and federal job training programs, and there are millions without jobs? How can we do a better job matching Americans up with employment opportunities?

I have learned that one solution to this problem is found in local communities all across America. It is found in community leaders like Robert Woodson, who have dedicated their lives to reviving neighborhoods and providing innovative solutions to poverty. It is found in creative and effective programs in prisons in Kansas, where Seat King employs hundreds of inmates working 50 hours a week and making \$8 to \$15 an hour. It is found in churches like the Greater Praise Church of God in Christ in Milwaukee, where Pastor Jerome Smith leads an initiative known as The Joseph Project to train, connect, and transport workers seeking employment to opportunities around Wisconsin. These are not just jobs, these are careers, and all because innovative, thoughtful people had a dream, a mutual need, and a van filled with gas.

These companies, churches, and individuals are improving lives, providing opportunity and setting individuals up for success.

In 1964, President Johnson stated “[o]ur aim is not only to relieve the symptom of poverty, but to cure it and, above all, to prevent it.” In the 50 years since, the federal government has spent \$19.1 trillion on major anti-poverty programs. Many will debate whether the war on poverty has been won or lost. The purpose of today’s hearing is to highlight the important work that communities all across America do every day to help lift Americans out of poverty.

I thank the witnesses for being here today to discuss these important issues, and I look forward to your testimony.