

The New York Times

Letter

Poverty in New York City

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To the Editor:

It is disappointing that in editorializing on priorities for Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's third term ([editorial](#), Jan. 1), you didn't mention the urgent need to stem New York City's soaring poverty, hunger, homelessness and inequality of wealth.

In 2008, even before the economic downturn had its worst impact, 1.5 million city residents lived in poverty, 104,000 more than in 2000. More than 1.3 million New Yorkers are now forced to use food pantries and soup kitchens.

According to the Coalition for the Homeless, there are 45 percent more people staying in city homeless shelters nightly than when Mayor Bloomberg took office, with levels at an all-time high. On Jan. 7, there were 36,961 people, including 15,727 children, sleeping in city shelters, enough to fill Madison Square Garden two times over.

While the number of billionaires in the city dipped slightly in the last year (from 64 to 56), their combined net worth still equaled more than 27 times the yearly income of all 1.5 million New Yorkers in poverty. Given that these billionaires benefited disproportionately not only from the Wall Street bailout but also from decades of federal, state and city tax cuts, it is unpersuasive to continue to argue that their successes — and the poor's misfortune — are due solely to free-market forces.

For the mayor's third term to be truly successful, he should work with all levels of government — as well as with the private sector — to restore New York City's historic role as the nation's leading springboard of upward mobility.

Joel Berg
Executive Director, New York City
Coalition Against Hunger
New York, Jan. 1, 2010