

The Fourth of July is a time to celebrate the freedom and liberties we enjoy as Americans.

But these blessings do not flow to all of us equally, especially in Texas.

Despite Texas' great wealth, we have one of the highest poverty rates in the country.

In fact, according to the *2006 Kids Count Data Book*, a just-released national report on the well-being of children, child poverty is up 5 percent in Texas. Nearly one in four kids lives in poverty, less than \$16,600 a year for a family of three.

More Texans are at risk of going hungry than anywhere else in the country. Every day, one in six Texans is food insecure, meaning they aren't sure where they'll get their next meal. Nearly 5 percent of families actually goes hungry, ranking us fourth worst in the nation.

Texas also has the highest rate of adults and children without health insurance. One in four Texans is uninsured.

These problems have real consequences for all of us. If a family is living in poverty or if a child is hungry or sick, we all pay the price.

Studies consistently show that students who are hungry perform worse in school. Kids who do worse in school tend to drop out at higher rates and do not achieve their full potential. This in turn makes Texas' workforce less competitive and hurts our economy.

People who cannot afford to go to the doctor turn to emergency rooms when things get bad. Emergency room costs are passed along to the rest of us in higher private health insurance premiums and increased local taxes.

Some claim that the problem is that people just won't work.

Not true.

In fact, the vast majority of poor families are headed by a full-time worker.

Others claim that immigration is to blame. If we didn't have so many immigrants, these people say, our problems would disappear.

Again, not true.

If we took all our immigrants (both legal and unauthorized) out of the picture, the situation wouldn't change much. Texas would tie for the highest rate of people without health insurance in the nation. Texas would still have one of the highest poverty rates.

Indeed, even though California has a greater proportion of immigrants than Texas, California still fares better on all counts. Compared to Texas, California has lower poverty rates, less hunger and food insecurity, and a higher rate of people with health insurance.

This Fourth of July, as we celebrate our nation's birthday with fireworks and parades, we must remember that on this day 230 years ago, our founders adopted the Declaration of Independence. In it, they boldly declared that "all men are created equal." We must do more today to ensure equal opportunity and shared prosperity for all.

Lynsey Kluever  
Communications Director  
Center for Public Policy Priorities, Austin