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WITNESS FOR JUSTICE #387

August 25, 2008

Statistics Don't Lie

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Everybody spins it. The spokespeople for politicians spin it. The talking heads on news shows spin it. The teacher in the classroom spins it. The preacher spins it. Your last lousy date spins it.

Everybody spins it. The truth, that is. If I say the glass is half full, you'll say it's half empty. If she says the dog ate her homework, he'll say it was the cat. Truth is an illusory thing sometimes – a reality for one, a nightmare for another, a facade for someone else.

How do we know who is telling the truth? How do we know when a candidate is lying to us, or telling us like it really is? Does it have to take investigative journalists to uncover the real story? Or are we going to hold onto the distortions and lies put out initially about one's opponent even when they are clearly shown to be false a week later? (Remember those weapons of mass destruction that led the U.S. into war with Iraq? Not there – yet a significant portion of the public still believes that the presence of WMDs is why we invaded Iraq.)

Statistics – hard, cold numbers – don't lie. They simply expose what is there without commentary. I wish we had more discussion in the coming months leading up to election day about some statistics that paint a troubling picture of our country. I wish we could have some thoughtful consideration about what might be done to address them.

Here are some stats to chew on:

For all the rich countries in the world for which there is data, the US has:

- *The highest infant mortality rate*
- *The highest homicide rate*
- *The highest teenage birth rate*
- *The highest incarceration rate (the US houses 1/4 of the world's prisoners)*

- *The highest child poverty rate*
- *The highest number of people living alone*
- *The highest poverty rate*
- *The smallest middle class*
- *The largest wealth gap between the rich and the rest of the population*
- *The lowest voter turnout*

It's time we stopped spinning the truth – like the truth represented in these stats – and started taking a long, hard look in the mirror, admit that there are significant problems confronting our country and that there just might not be easy answers to any of them. If we stopped spinning enough to regain our balance, we will recognize that we have to work together – across the aisles, across the streets, across neighborhoods, across self-interests – to turn things around positively for those who bear the greatest burden of our dysfunction.

Ask the candidates – local, state and national candidates running for election - what they are going to do about these statistics. And don't let them go spinning away.

A resource on how to get your questions answered is included in "Our Faith, Our Vote," now available at: <http://www.ucc.org/ourfaithourvote/>

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