



Blueprint For Prosperity: Mayor Wharton Works To Reduce Memphis Poverty

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By Les Smith, Reporter

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (FOX13) - Mayor A C Wharton has been working on an already controversial plan to reduce Memphis poverty over the next ten (clock...) but how can many already on the economic ropes afford to wait that long?

"It's horrifying. It is devastating. But I'm not going to despair. This why we're going to work," said Memphis Mayor A C Wharton.

This is Memphis Mayor A C Wharton's reaction to the results of a 'Measure of America' 98-city study citing Memphis as the worst for having the number of what it called disconnected youth between the ages 16 to 24 that were either not in school or without a job.

Ironically, it came on the same day we had agreed to talk about his highly touted "Blueprint For Prosperity" program which he told us would be in full operation by the fall. In a nutshell, its goal is to reduce the 28 percent poverty rate in Memphis by one percent a year over the next 10 years with a cooperative boost from Memphis employers. Take for instance aiding in a worker's transportation needs.

"Even with that job, if you've got more money going out the back end than you have coming in the front end from that job, you're still no better, no better off," continued the mayor. "Buying a fleet of small vehicles. We'd set up a non for profit. We'll run these small vehicles. If you want to go to work at three o'clock in the morning. Bye, George, it's there."

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However, we wanted to see if anybody else had some ideas, given the city's current socio-economic problems, about carving out a brighter future for Memphians.

"We have to let our young people know that you can make a good living by going into a vocational program. There's a driver shortage in the trucking industry. We also need plumbers. We need electricians. So, trades pay very well," said Memphis City Councilman Berlin Boyd.

"Involve the clergy of the city, the school system and juvenile court. And with all three of us working together, I think we'll be able to create some programs that will entice these kids to go in the right direction," said Sidney Chism of SCSO community relations.

Yet, there are still youthful minds, like 22-year old Emanuel Ufer, who are mapping out their own destinies. Ufer, who was born in Liberia, plans on one day becoming a Memphis police officer. He told FOX13 the guidance toward embarking on a successful future should come from within.

"I think we choose to follow peer pressures. We want to go with the "in" crowd. But, you have to be strong-willed and follow your own mind. Go with what you want to go with. Be a man of understanding," said Emanuel Ufer.

In August, more than a dozen of the nation's urban mayors will be among those attending a three day conference in Memphis on how to attack poverty hosted by Mayor Wharton.

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