

ASK UNCLE ED 2

Dear Uncle Ed*

I'm a white working class guy. I voted for Trump because I don't think that government should help undeserving people. Especially women who pop out babies like Pez dispensers with different baby daddies so they can get welfare every month and their housing and food paid for. They are living large, while people like me are struggling to put food on the table. My neighbors who are less responsible than me are receiving nearly free insurance through Medicaid. They can go to the emergency room for a headache.

This has nothing to do with race. So, why do all the liberals just assume I am a racist? I just want to be treated fairly and have my hard work acknowledged.

Signed, Unhappy in Iowa**.

Dear Unhappy in Iowa

For starters, when you talk about women popping out babies with different baby daddies, it sounds like you mean African-Americans, just like Ronald Reagan did with his fables about strapping young bucks buying T-Bones with food stamps. This kind of talk makes it hard for Uncle Ed to completely ignore the possibility that maybe there is just a bit of racism here.

But since you don't think it's about race, you could use different words. Just think of the people in your extended family and your neighbors who benefit from those programs. Use language that is based on them instead. After all, the majority of people getting food stamps, welfare and Medicaid, and even Obamaphones, are white.

We probably agree that there are plenty of people who need the welfare system to work for them, like this woman whose body is broken after years of grinding labor.

Resident Christa Cossey found work at age 20 as a long-haul truck driver, a well-paid job for someone without a college degree. Now 51, she's been on disability since 2008 because of ailments related to her years of driving: obesity, asthma, atypical chest pain, diabetes, fibromyalgia, high blood pressure, and arthritis in her neck, shoulders, elbows, wrists, and fingers. She also suffers from degenerative disc disease, degenerative joint disease, and bulging discs in her lower back.

We also agree that too many people abuse the system. And you know as well as Uncle Ed does that every system can be and is abused. But let's be honest. Some of the people abusing the system are your kin and your white neighbors. It isn't just Black and Brown people.

Uncle Ed has another suggestion. Next time you go by the food court, look at the people cleaning up the tables and emptying the trash cans. Next time you see a garbage truck, look at the guys picking up that nasty stuff and muscling it into the truck. Next time you visit your grandmother in the nursing home, look at the aides who wash and dress her, who turn her over, and who hold her hand when she's crying and you can't be there. See how many of them are Black and Brown.

Ask yourself this question. Do you think these hard-working people aren't just as angry as you are about the people in their own communities abusing the system? Do you think they don't have family and friends who are on disability thanks to a cheating doctor? Don't you think it makes them furious when they see white people cheating the system?

It's true they probably don't like the same TV shows you do, or the same music or the same movies or go to the same churches, bars and restaurants you do, and they don't support the same politicians you do. Of course, they

probably root for the same teams you do. But when it comes to money, they work hard and they care just as much as you do how the government spends their taxes. If it weren't for that color thing that keeps you apart, they'd be your natural allies. Trump frequently asked them to vote for him on that basis, and a lot of them did, so you know that's true.

The stuff you are complaining about isn't about race. It's about who works and who doesn't. Don't make it about race or you'll lose your natural allies.

Uncle Ed suggests you look at the big picture: the overall economic system that's beating you and your allies into the dirt, and that hasn't given you or any other working guy a decent raise in decades. At root the things that got you to vote for Trump aren't about race, they're about an unfair economic system that forces millions of people to struggle to make any kind of living and abandons them when they get sick or get laid off when the plant moves to Thailand. It's a system that serves you and your neighbors and your kin badly, and wallops Black and Brown people even harder. You need all the allies you can get.

You say that the current safety net gives undeserving people something you don't get. For example, you have to pay for a lousy health policy while they get free Medicaid that's probably better. When the Republicans repeal Obamacare, do you really think the replacement will be better for you? You know it won't: you aren't rich. Maybe secretly you hope the Republicans will set up a plan that gives you something other people don't get?

Well, here's the thing. There are never ever going to be any government programs or regulations or loopholes that give you something while denying it to groups you don't like. That is unconstitutional. Even Trump can't make that happen. I can promise you that the Coastal Elites will crush any attempt to do that in the courts, no matter how many Justices Trump

appoints.

You have two choices. You can let the Republicans destroy the safety net that protects you and the people you think are deserving.

Or, you can figure out a way to do politics in your own interest without regard to who else might benefit, and at the same time limit the cheating.

For example, suppose everyone got Medicare at fair and reasonable premiums, maybe related to income, and you could buy private insurance to cover whatever Medicare didn't. Our income taxes might go up to cover the cost, but the rich would pay more and that that would be fair. We'd probably have to do something more for really poor people. Whatever plan we come up with, everyone, regardless of merit, is going to be covered. That would get rid of most of the cheating.

One thing is for sure, you'll find lots of allies among the African-Americans and Hispanics who want the same thing. With them and the liberals, you are a huge majority of voters. And that's how you get what you need from both political parties.

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* This is part of a series in which I try to take Trump voters at their word and work out ways of responding. After I wrote the first draft, I ran across this essay in the Washington Spectator by Matt Hartman that clarified my thinking, and the current draft tries to reflect the ideas in that article.

** Closely follows this Washington Post article by Catherine Rampell, and this one by Sarah Kliff at Vox.