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The Philadelphia Inquirer

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CENSUS

Income up, city poverty declines

While observers were pleased with the gains, Phila. remains the nation's poorest big city.

By Alfred Lubrano
STAFF WRITER

Philadelphia's poverty rate, a stark and stubborn indicator of hard times that has long hindered the city's reputation, dropped to its lowest level since 2008 — near the start of the recession.

At the same time, median household income here rose.

► CENSUS MISCE: Those 2017 statistics about contained in a Philadelphia? volumnous report from the U.S. Census Bureau released Thursday, showed that the city's poverty rate declined from 25.7% in 2016 to 24.5% in 2018. The number of Philadelphia residents living in poverty dropped by 14,537 — from 391,653 to 377,116 — while the median household income (adjusted for inflation) increased from \$43,372 to \$46,116.

In a rare and startling addendum to the report, known as the American Community Survey (ACS), the Census Bureau said that the data contained in last year's release, which depicted poverty, income, and other aspects of life in Philadelphia in 2017, were incorrect. Census officials advised that the erroneous See **POVERTY** on A4

E-CIGARETTES

Juul drops advertising amid uproar

Also out: Its CEO, and a merger of tobacco firms.

By Laurie McGinley
WASHINGTON POST

E-cigarette maker Juul Labs, at the center of a public uproar over a surge in youth vaping, said Wednesday that it was suspending all of its advertising in the United States, including its "Make the Switch" campaign that has drawn fire from the Food and Drug Administration

CONSTITUTIONAL CLASH | INVESTIGATING A PRESIDENT

A War Over Words



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and President Donald Trump meet Wednesday at a hotel conference room in Manhattan, hours after a memo of their July 25 phone call was released by the White House. EVAN VUCCI / AP

Ukraine becomes focus of Democrats' revved-up push for impeachment.

By Philip Rucker, Rachel Bade, and Robert Costa
WASHINGTON POST

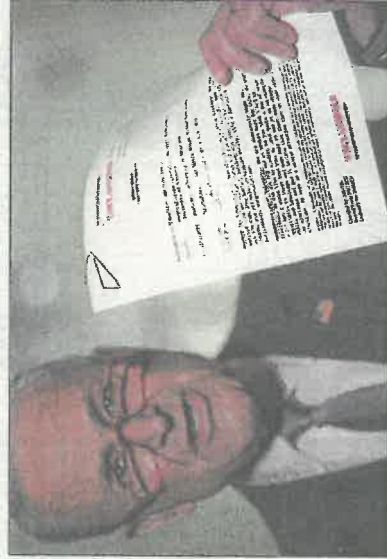
WASHINGTON — The publicly released notes Wednesday of President

Donald Trump's phone call with his Ukrainian counterpart turbocharged the Democratic push on Capitol Hill for his impeachment.

The five pages of a rough transcript of Trump's call asking Ukrainian President Volod-

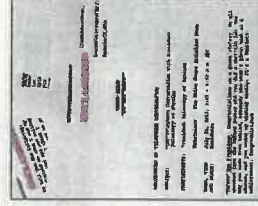
ymyr Zelenskyy to work with Attorney General William Barr and personal attorney Rudy Giuliani to investigate Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden landed like a hand grenade on Capitol Hill and led House Democrats to recalibrate their strategy.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) and her fellow Democratic leaders agreed to speed up their impeachment investigation and significantly narrow it to Trump's dealings with Ukraine, according to five See **INQUIRY** on A12



Sen. Chuck Schumer (D., N.Y.) holds a copy of the transcript.

INSIDE



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► TRUDY RUBIN: The view from Ukraine is

Memo shows Trump sought Biden probe

By Devin Barrett, Matt Zapotosky, Carol D. Leonnig, and Josh Dawsey
WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump repeatedly urged the Ukrainian president to investigate Joe Biden, one of his chief political rivals, and offered to enlist the U.S. attorney general in that effort while dangling the possibility of inviting the foreign leader to the White House, according to a rough transcript of the call released Wednesday.

The July 25 phone call between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy raised alarms among some intelligence officials, leading in August to a secret whistle-blower complaint and a Justice Department referral to determine whether the president's conduct amounted to a violation of a campaign finance law that bars foreign contributions to U.S. politicians.

Prosecutors reviewed the rough transcript and last week declined to investigate, concluding that the president had not violated campaign laws, senior Justice Department officials said Wednesday.

The document touched off a

ACS. In reams of figures, it tells the story of who we are, and how we're living. It's the biggest household survey in America after The Census, according to

Poverty

Continued from A1

statistics for that year not be used in making comparisons. That admission rolled some city leaders, at the same time confirming their suspicions that those figures had been wrong all along.

Like a busted needle stuck in the red zone, Philadelphia's poverty rate had not dipped below 25% since 2008. Economists, city officials, and some antipoverty advocates, then, were gratified to see a positive fluctuation in poverty, as well as in household income.

"It's meaningful improvement, particularly the healthy gain in median income," said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics. "It goes to the strength of the Philadelphia economy, which is about as strong as I've ever seen in terms of wage growth, unemployment, and number of jobs."

Ira Goldstein, president of policy solutions at the Reinvestment Fund in Philadelphia, a financial institution that helps low-income people, thought the ACS findings made sense.

"There's no reason we shouldn't have a lower poverty rate," he said. "The unemployment rate in the city in May was 4.9%, down from 6.7% in 2016. We went from 653,000 employed to 681,000."

Not surprisingly, Mayor Jim Kenney's office was pleased.

"It gives us hope and confidence that we are making progress," said Maari Porter, deputy chief of staff policy and strategic initiatives in the mayor's office. "But there's no denying one-quarter of Philadelphia's in poverty are still too many."

Still, she cited beneficial city policies of "supporting people who need help with housing and eviction," focusing on workforce development, and expanding pre-K for children.

Philadelphia echoed national trends that show poverty is dropping. The U.S. poverty rate took a 0.5 percentage point dip, from 12.3% in 2017 (non-Philadelphia census numbers from 2017 are considered fine to use) to 11.8% last year. The U.S. median income in 2018 was listed as \$63,179, not statistically different from the 2017 level of \$62,626.

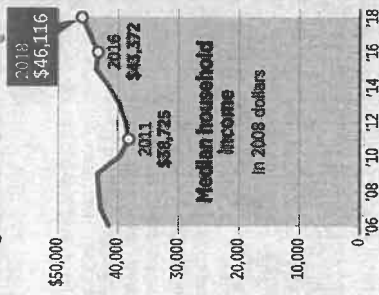
While encouraging, the Philadelphia numbers aren't all good. For example, Philadelphia remains the poorest of the 10 most populous U.S. cities, the ACS showed.

Further, its childhood poverty rate was 34.6%, compared with around 20% nationwide. And while its deep poverty rate — a measure of people living at 50% of the poverty line or below — dipped somewhat in 2018, it came in at 11.1%, the highest among cities with a population of one million or more. The pov-

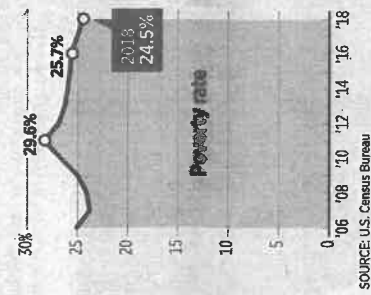
Each survey looks backward at the previous year to compare how numbers rose or fell, thus teasing out trends and changes. The 2018 survey, then, de-

Changes in Income and Poverty in Philadelphia

Income for the typical Philadelphia household in 2018 was 20% higher than its low point after the last recession, and 6% higher than in 2016 ...



... and the percentage of residents in poverty has fallen by 1.2 points since 2016, and by 3.9 points from its postrecession peak in 2011.



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau

JOHN DUCHESKIE / Staff Graphic

erty line for a family of three in 2018 was \$20,780.

No victory laps

Some poverty experts were unimpressed with the ACS.

"No one should be doing a victory lap," said Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America, a national nonprofit. "Philadelphia still has one of the highest poverty levels in the Western world."

Mariana Chilton, a director of the Center for Hunger-Free Communities at Drexel University, and the leading local expert on hunger, said the numbers weren't significantly different than past data and demonstrated a sad "status quo" in Philadelphia. "The brilliance and potential of people living in poverty are squandered through bad policies and empty promises of incremental change," she said.

Glad to see that people moved out of poverty, and that the median household income trended upward, Ashley Putnam, director of the economic growth and mobility project of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, nevertheless wondered whether enough people are sharing in the improved conditions.

The ACS income data chal-

men it doesn't make sense. That's a good rule."

government from the federal In retrospect, everything makes sense to people who had been baffled by the 2017 findings.



Russell Hadlock outside a Kensington soup kitchen. New data showed the city's poverty rate falling to just below 25%, its lowest level since 2008, but still far above the national average. STEVEN M. FALK / Staff Photographer

llege the phrase "A rising tide lifts all boats," she said. "Are all residents benefitting from the rising tide?"

Poverty dips in Pa. and N.J.

Measuring poverty and income elsewhere, the ACS showed that poverty rates in New Jersey dipped slightly between 2017 and 2018, from 10% to 9.5%. In Pennsylvania, poverty also slid downward, from 12.5% to 11.7%.

As for median household income, New Jersey saw a 2% growth, from \$80,088 in 2017 to \$81,740. "Up" was the watchword throughout Pennsylvania, with income rising from \$59,195 to \$60,905, a 3% bump.

The counties around Philadelphia yielded a mixed bag of data. In a puzzling finding, median household income in Gloucester County dropped by more than \$7,600 between 2017 and 2018, from \$89,496 to \$81,849, the biggest decline in the region. At the same time, poverty showed a 1.6 percentage point rise. County officials were at a loss to explain why.

Meanwhile, Camden County confounded observers by registering increases in both income and poverty. Income popped up 2% from \$66,196 to \$67,523. At the same time, however, poverty rates somehow climbed from 11.5% to 13.3%, the 18 percentage point jump the largest in any county in the region.

It's likely a variation on the notion that the rich get richer, and the poor stay stranded, said Mujib Salaaam Parker, grant manager at the Camden County Council on Economic Opportunity.

"The middle class here saw a rise in income, and state incentives relocated lots of businesses to the city of Camden," Parker said. But the office jobs could

Median Household Income in Local Counties

Chester County has the highest median household income among counties in the region. Philadelphia is the only county with an estimated increase in income (adjusted to 2018 dollars) over the last 10 years.

County	Median household income in 2018	1-yr. chg.	5-yr. chg.	10-yr. chg.
SOUTH JERSEY				
Burlington	\$84,889	-5%	+2%	-6%
Camden	\$67,523	0%	+8%	-5%
Gloucester	\$81,849	-11%	+6%	-1%
SOUTHEASTERN PA.				
Bucks	\$88,569	+2%	+11%	0%
Chester	\$99,119	0%	+10%	-1%
Delaware	\$72,045	-5%	+3%	-5%
Montgomery	\$90,172	+1%	+9%	-1%
Philadelphia	\$46,116	N.A.*	+16%	+7%

* Median household income for Philadelphia in 2017 is not available because of data-collection errors for that year by the Census Bureau. SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau.

JOHN DUCHESKIE / Staff Graphic

not help those in poverty, who lack the computer skills to work in such places, she added.

Bucks County, meanwhile, showed a 5% increase in median household income (\$84,749 to \$88,569), the largest rise among Philadelphia's suburban counties on either side of the river. Marissa Christie, president and CEO of United Way Bucks County, was at a loss to explain. "I'm having a hard time reconciling an increase in income while our unemployment rate increased from 3.4% to 4% between June and July," she said. "There's a very high cost of living here. And at any moment, people's families can be derailed."

It's true, no one expects to be mired in poverty, noted Robert Locke, 71, a retired security officer living on Social Security in North-

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The Inquirer is one of 21 news organizations producing Broke in Philly, a collaborative reporting project on solutions to poverty and the city's push toward economic justice. See all of our reporting at brokeinphilly.org.

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