

Bob Dole



NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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WISCONSIN WELFARE REFORM

STATEMENT OF SENATE MAJORITY LEADER BOB DOLE

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole made the following statement from the Senate floor this week commending Governor Tommy Thompson and the Wisconsin Legislature for the passage of "Wisconsin Works," a program in Wisconsin replacing the failed national welfare system:

Our current welfare system doesn't work -- because it is not based on the proven American formula for escaping poverty: a job. A strong family. A good education. Saving some money to buy a home.

Instead, it undermines almost every value that leads to self-reliance and success. Poverty persists and three out of every ten births are out-of-wedlock. Unbelievably, the out-of-wedlock birth rate is 80 percent in some communities.

Within the past year, the U.S. Congress has twice passed federal welfare reform. President Clinton has vetoed it both times. Let's face it, President Clinton has preserved the current system, which is trapping another generation of Americans in despair and locking them out of the American dream.

"Wisconsin Works"

Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson refuses to allow this to happen. Last Thursday, he signed into law a program replacing in Wisconsin the failed national welfare system. It is called "Wisconsin Works". The new program provides work opportunities and work programs. In order to help beneficiaries get a job, it makes available child care and health care to all low income families who need it.

As Governor Thompson stated, "after almost a decade of welfare reform experiments, [Wisconsin Works] represents the end of welfare in Wisconsin. The current Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program has become, for many families, a way of life. Because the program does not require work or provide incentives to become self-sufficient, it has trapped many families in dependency. [Wisconsin Works] aims to rebuild the connection between work and income and help families achieve self-sufficiency."

Due to his experience, Governor Thompson knows what he is talking about. He has made welfare reform a top priority by introducing more than ten reform initiatives and by working hard to fix the current welfare-to-work program called JOBS. During his administration Wisconsin's AFDC caseload has been reduced by more than 27 percent.

Waivers -- No Solution

Wisconsin Works is the good news. Now let me give you the bad. The Governor and the Wisconsin legislature can't deliver to the people of Wisconsin this replacement for the failed system until President Clinton and his administration give them permission. By twice vetoing federal welfare reform passed by our Congress, the President has denied Wisconsin and many other states the opportunity to put into place needed reforms.

The status quo, which the President has preserved, requires Wisconsin to come to the Clinton administration on bended knee to ask Washington bureaucrats for permission to make adjustments to the current one-size-fits-all national welfare system.

No doubt about it, while welfare recipients remain trapped in the current system, President Clinton will claim he has helped reform welfare by granting states permission to experiment through controlled demonstration programs known as "waivers".

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The reality is these waivers are not the solution. We all know waivers have brought us in the right direction. However, the waiver process perpetuates a flawed system. Real change will only occur when states are released from the burden of excessive federal rules and regulations. The waiver process is too costly, time consuming and burdensome, often requiring months and months of negotiating between a state and the relevant federal cabinet agency.

Earlier this year, all 50 of the nation's governors rejected the waiver process in favor of comprehensive welfare reform. Their unanimously adopted policy would provide greater state flexibility to enhance states as "laboratories of democracy" while ensuring the necessary state accountability to promote work, family and individual self-sufficiency among welfare beneficiaries.

The national bi-partisan governors' welfare policy reflects the principles contained in both welfare reform bills passed by the Congress and vetoed by the President. I remain committed to working with our nation's governors to accomplish real federal welfare reform.

Returning Power to the States and People

President Clinton has said that he is reluctant to return power to the states because it will lead to a "race to the bottom." As Governor Thompson and the Wisconsin legislature have proved, however, compassion and innovation can go hand in hand. I congratulate them for their achievement, and I invite President Clinton to join with this Congress in moving power out of Washington and returning it to where it belongs -- our states, our communities, and our people.

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