

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

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WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

STATEMENT OF SENATE MAJORITY LEADER DOLE

There has been a great deal of speculation in recent days over the prospects for passage of a welfare reform bill. Before departing for the recess, I wanted the opportunity to set the record straight.

Notwithstanding the efforts of some to drive us apart, Republicans are committed to truly ending welfare as we know it. We are not unmindful of the struggles faced by many in this country who need a hand up some time in their lives, or of children who through no fault of their own need the helping hand of the government. But we are also not convinced that the federal government holds all the answers to the very real problems these people face. In fact, the real story is that notwithstanding the billions of dollars that have been spent over the last decade, the welfare rolls have continued to grow and the number of children at risk has increased. We have all decried these problems and have responded by adding to the list of the things that the states must do. Well, the time has come to listen to the states for a change and give them a chance to devise some solutions that fit their needs.

The issues that divide us are not insurmountable nor are they easily resolved. But the extraordinary thing is that the debate is not over whether we want block grants -- its how best to design them. Our differences are over how to distribute the funds and how much flexibility to give the states in the design of these programs.

The funding issue is a real one and of critical importance to all states. There are states that will experience real population growth that are concerned they will be disadvantaged in this new block grant environment. There are also states that in the past have committed considerable state resources to the program that feel their past contributions should be acknowledged.

No formula fight is ever easy. The House and Senate bills create loan funds -- but this may not be the perfect answer. We will seek other options to balance the needs of all.

The second group of issues is equally thorny. None of us are unconcerned about the dramatic increase in the numbers of teen pregnancies and the number of children born out-of-wedlock. These are serious issues -- not easily addressed. Many of us believe the governors of our states can and will deal with these problems, as many of them have tried to do. They want us out of the way -- not dictating solutions. Others believe that the issue can best be addressed here.

I remain hopeful we can strike some middle ground and am working to that end.

For at the end of the day we cannot fail. We must not break faith with the American people who sent us a clear message last fall -- end welfare as we know it once and for all, require real work, and make it a temporary helping hand, not a lifestyle.

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