

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

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Contact: Clarkson Hine
(202) 224-5358

WORK OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 1995

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATE MAJORITY LEADER BOB DOLE

I just want to join with a number of my colleagues in sharing a few thoughts as this very important debate gets underway.

And before discussing what I believe this debate is all about, I want to mention what it is not about.

This debate is not which party cares most for those in need.

It is not about which party has the biggest heart.

Every Senator knows there are Americans who need help.

Every Senator knows there are families struggling day to day to keep their head above water.

Some of us know how hard it is, because we've been there ourselves, and we watched our parents do everything they could to make ends meet.

So, this is not a debate on which party has the most compassion. Each of us knows that government must help those in need.

Changing the Current Failed System

But each of us also knows the current welfare system has failed.

It has failed American taxpayers who have poured trillions and trillions and trillions of dollars into the system.

And, most definitely, it has failed those Americans it was designed to serve, trapping them into a system that does not encourage work, that often penalizes families, and that ultimately leaves them with no hope.

What this debate is all about, then, is what we do next. How do we replace the current failed system?

And over the coming days, I expect we'll hear a variety of options.

There are those who believe that we can fix the current system by tinkering on the edges here, and applying a band-aid there. This, I believe, is the prescription offered by the legislation proposed by the Democrat leader. In my opinion, however--and I think in the opinion of the overwhelming majority of Americans--our welfare system is far beyond fine-tuning.

I am proud to be joined by 32 of my colleagues, and by a majority of America's governors in supporting S. 1120--legislation that will fundamentally reform our welfare system from top to bottom.

Returning Power to States, Communities, Neighborhoods & Families

S. 1120 will change the very principles and values on which the system is based.

And, perhaps most importantly it will change the "Washington, D.C. knows best" attitude that permeates the entire current welfare system, by dramatically shifting power out of this city, and back to our states, our communities, our neighborhoods, and our families.

Instead of more mandates, more bureaucracy, and more federal control, S. 1120 will combine AFDC, child care programs under AFDC, and job training programs under AFDC, into one block grant, and our states will be free to spend the money as they see fit.

And, as a result of the work of the Senate Labor Committee, we will also consolidate, and put into another single program, 88 job training and training-related educational programs, including the JTPA program and the Carl Perkins Vocational Training and Education program.

Returning power to the states is something that makes President Clinton nervous. He has said on several occasions that giving our states control will incite a "race to the bottom."

I have asked President Clinton before and will ask again:

Which states will participate in such a race?

Which Governor does he think does not care about those in need?

Which state legislature can't be trusted with welfare of their people?

The truth is that our states can be trusted with these things. Federal control just hasn't worked.

(more)

Importance of Family & Reducing Illegitimacy

And while I want to reduce the very disturbing number of children born out of wedlock just as much as every other Senator, I don't think the best way to do it is through more federal control.

Our bill recognizes that the states are better able than the federal government to determine what programs will best reduce illegitimacy.

Make no mistake about it, S. 1120 recognizes the importance of the family. It recognizes that families that stay together are far less likely to be on welfare than those that don't.

And it takes the common sense approach of requiring that single teen parents receiving welfare must stay in school and live under adult supervision. And it gives states the authority to deny cash payments to teenager mothers and place family caps on cash assistance--without asking the federal government for approval.

It also requires that welfare applicants cooperate in paternity establishment of their children, and requires the states to achieve a 90% success rate.

One of the reasons the current system has failed is that it provides no time limits for receiving welfare, and it offers ineffective motivation for recipients to leave the welfare rolls for a payroll.

Bill Contains Strong, Binding Work Requirement

I have long fought to put work back into our welfare system.

In 1988, I was joined by then Senator Bill Armstrong in making a number of modifications to the Family Security Act, which Senator Moynihan mentioned earlier today.

The intention of our amendments was to make certain that the states realized the importance we placed on work. In order to achieve this, we introduced what were known as participation standards, that required states to make certain a percentage of their population was actually engaged in work.

And S. 1120 goes even further. With no exceptions, every adult recipient must start working and stay working. And in our bill, work means work. No year long job searches. No graduate degrees. No moving from one training program to another.

Those who suggest there is no binding work requirement in this bill are just wrong. The bottom line is that S. 1120 contains the same provisions that are in the House bill with respect to the number of hours that must be worked--and it actually contains tougher participation requirements. I have also modified the bill to include the House provision regarding sanctions on those who refuse to work. While the leadership bill required the states to sanction -- it left it up to the states as to the actual reduction. Some have suggested that this left in doubt our commitment to work. There isn't any doubt about our commitment to work. But to clarify it, the modification offered today requires that the states, at a minimum, must reduce the benefits by at least the amount not worked. This was a recommendation offered in a proposed amendment by Senator Rod Grams of Minnesota.

The modification clarifies another issue as well. Since introducing our bill, we have heard from a number of governors, including the Governor of Utah, Governor Mike Leavitt, that we were shortsighted in excluding vocational education from the list of those activities permitted under our definition of work. Of course, the concern has been that some individuals have successfully avoided having to ever work by staying in some kind of training. This modification, supported by Senators Hatch and Bennett, tries to strike a balance -- by permitting vocational education for up to one year.

Shift Power to States & Eliminate Federal Bureaucracy

By shifting power back to the states, our bill will remove thousands of pages of government regulation from the books, and the federal welfare and job training bureaucracies at the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Labor will be reduced by 30%. And, the CBO estimates that over the next seven years, this legislation will save \$70 billion--the largest reduction in welfare spending in history.

We have some vigorous debate and some tough votes ahead of us. I hope, however, that the debate does not become overly partisan. Let us not lose sight of the two most important facts in this debate. First, our current system has failed. And, second, it's our duty to fix it.

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* Remarks delivered on Senate floor, approximately 3:20 p.m.