

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

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WELFARE REFORM

HISTORIC WORK OPPORTUNITY ACT ENDS WELFARE AS A WAY OF LIFE

The Senate began debating welfare reform on August 7th. And in my opening statement on that day, I predicted that we had some contentious debate and tough votes ahead of us.

I also said that through it all, the Senate should not and could not lose sight of two overriding facts:

Fact #1: Our current welfare system has failed.

Fact #2: It's our duty to fix it.

We've had nearly 100 hours of debate since then--some of it contentious; and over 40 votes--some of them very tough.

And my colleagues will remember that not long after the debate began, it appeared we had reached a roadblock. And some in the media were quick to report that Senate Republicans had failed, and that welfare reform was on its last legs.

The media got the story wrong, because what's on its last legs in this Congress is the status quo.

And today I am proud to say that the Senate has kept our promise.

No more business as usual.

No more tinkering around the edges with a system that has cost American taxpayers \$5.4 trillion in federal and state spending over the past thirty-five years.

Revolutionizing Welfare

Instead, we are fulfilling our duty.

We are not only fixing welfare, we are revolutionizing it.

We are writing truly historic landmark legislation--legislation that ends a 60 year entitlement program.

In the process, we are closing the book on a six decade long story of a system that may have been well-intentioned, but a system that failed the American taxpayer, and that failed those it was designed to serve.

And today, we begin to write a new American story.

A story about Americans who earn a paycheck, rather than drawing a welfare check.

A story about an America where welfare is no longer a way of life, and where people no longer will be able to receive endless federal cash benefits just because they choose not to work.

A story about an America where power is actually transferred away from federal bureaucrats in Washington and given back to our 50 state capitals.

A story about an America that recognizes that the family is the most important unit in our society.

There are some in this Chamber--including Senator Moynihan, for whom I have the greatest respect--who believe the story we write today may turn out to be a harsh one.

I disagree. I believe nothing could be harsher on American men women and children in need to continue with a system that has failed them.

Fair, Common Sense System

And rather than being harsh, I believe the vast majority of Americans agree that the system we create today is fair, it does help those in need, and, above all, it is based on simple "common sense."

It's common sense to require welfare recipients who are actually able to work to do just that.

It's common sense to put a five year lifetime limit on welfare benefits, so that it does not become a way of life.

It's common sense to give our states the flexibility to devise programs that meet the specific needs of their citizens.

It's common sense to put a cap on spending, because no program with an unlimited budget will ever be made to work effectively and efficiently.

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It's common sense to require that teenage mothers who have children out of wedlock to stay in school and live under adult supervision in order to receive benefits--otherwise they have no chance to move off welfare.

It's common sense to grant our states the ability to try and reduce our alarming illegitimacy rate.

The American people should know that this legislation is not perfect.

And they should know that it's passage will not magically solve our many social problems.

New Chapter of Hope & Opportunity for Millions

But the Work Opportunity Act does put an end to a failed system.

It does offer hope and opportunity to millions of Americans.

It is a revolutionary step in the right direction.

And it is further proof of the commitment of this Congress to keep its word with the American people.

At the risk of forgetting someone, I want to thank a number of Senators on both sides of the aisle who helped to make today's victory for the American people possible.

Certainly, all the members of the Senate Finance Committee deserve our thanks for their outstanding work. Senator Hutchison was instrumental in reaching agreement on the funding formula. Senator Faircloth led the fight for important amendments regarding abstinence education.

And a special word of thanks is owed to our remarkable freshman class, who sunk their teeth into this issue from day one and never let go. Senators Abraham, Snowe, and Ashcroft all authored important amendments. And Senator Santorum was on the floor almost every minute during the debate, ensuring that we kept moving forward.

Giving States Authority & Flexibility to Provide Solutions

Let me also thank America's governors, who worked very closely with us throughout this process. State and local governments are closest to those in need, and, as I indicated, this bill will give them the authority and flexibility to provide innovative solutions.

The vote we will cast in a few minutes is not, of course, the end of the process. This legislation must be reconciled with the House-passed legislation, which is every bit as revolutionary and innovative as the Senate's.

And make no mistake about it. We will iron out the few differences. And we will iron them out quickly. And then we will send a historic bill to the President.

And I hope and believe that the President will sign it. I hope that he will join with this Congress and the American people in writing an exciting new chapter in the history of this great nation.

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