

Welfare issues are the next battleground

BY CELES KING, III

Theodore H. White, the late, great chronicler of presidential campaigns, once said that there are only three great national issues: "Bread and butter, war and peace and Black and white."

The current controversy over the elimination--or at a minimum, the restructuring--of the welfare system as we know it, embodies all of White's three great issues.

Man's concern for survival in both the best and worst of times, is paramount--hence bread and butter. The current controversy unfortunately pits the middle and upper class

against the least fortunate among us--war and peace.

Finally, the debate over welfare often lapses into vitriol that sometimes points fingers between the races--thus Black and white.

Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was a federally prescribed welfare program developed in the 1930's to help single mothers who were widowed and those who were abandoned by their husbands. There were no work expectations of these women and it was likely that once remarried their needs for welfare ceased. But that was then, this is now. Societal ex-

pectations and conditions are much different today, but AFDC's objectives remains fundamentally unchanged.

However, a number of steps have been taken, particularly in California, to get welfare recipients back on the employment rolls. Even with these changes, approximately 80 percent of the state's recipients are still not working, not even part time.

On Aug. 22, 1996 President Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 which has effectively eliminated the welfare program. The new fed-

eral legislation sends block grant funds to the states to provide time-limited benefits to families. Unfortunately, due to the shortsightedness of many conservative legislators, their actions to throw people off the program willy nilly, is making a bad situation worse. This will have a drastic effect on people who need this program the most--poor whites, undocumented aliens, Blacks and other minorities.

What are we going to do to help alleviate the crisis that will occur when these new welfare change take full effect? Minority communities,

in particular, have lost at least one generation by welfare coming into their communities; are we now going to lose another generation as a welfare goes out of the community? The burden clearly falls on community leaders, church organizations and academics.

Small businesses, for example, need to create new ways to do their work in a technological society where the computer reigns supreme. Then they could hire these former welfare

recipients and train them where they can be truly productive. Employment in sweatshops and dead end manufacturing piecemeal just won't do.

As we get closer to the end of the century, we must be mindful that when the underclass suffers, the rest of us will ultimately pay the price.

Celes King, III is a Los Angeles businessman and state chairman of the Congress of Racial Equality of California.

Whitehouse hires from welfare

With welfare rolls down by 20 percent since he took office, President Clinton aims to chip away a little more by hiring thousands of welfare recipients into federal offices--including the White House.

The president was summoning his Cabinet today for its first full meeting of the second term to review numeric, agency-by-agency hiring goals and time tables for reaching them.

Aides said Clinton would commit the federal government, which employs 1.9 million people, to hire close to 10,000 welfare recipients over the next four years. The first 2,000 or so would be hired before the Sept. 30 close of this fiscal year.

As proof that welfare hires can work, two former welfare moms employed by the Social Security Administration were expected to join Clinton and Vice President Al Gore for at least part of the afternoon

Cabinet meeting. Spokeswoman Ann Lewis said Wednesday that the president's executive office -- one of the government's smallest outlets, with 1,500 employees -- would recruit and hire its share from the welfare rolls as part of Clinton's drive to find jobs in the public and private sectors for 2 million welfare recipients over the next four years.

"We think we have an obligation to set an example," Lewis said. She added that mostly entry-level jobs would be open. Union leaders have expressed reservations about the hiring initiative and its potential to push other job applicants from the pool, especially after the Clinton administration cut or contracted out more than 250,000 federal jobs over the last four years.

The announcement of specific government hiring goals, which Clinton first ordered last month, was timed to coincide with the release of

new administration data showing that about 2,755,000 individuals have gotten off the welfare rolls since January 1993 -- from 14,115,000 recipients to 11,360,000 recipients, or a 20 percent drop.

White House officials credit the generally stronger economy plus federally approved state welfare experiments with the overall drop. In its four years in power, the Clinton administration has granted waivers to 43 states, allowing them to implement their own welfare changes.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services survey, only Alaska, California and Hawaii, plus the District of Columbia, showed a caseload increase, with Hawaii's welfare rolls actually increasing by 20 percent.

Clinton has tried to soften the blow of welfare legislation he signed last year, which imposed a lifetime benefits' limit of five years for fami-

lies on welfare, by pushing the private sector, nonprofit groups and churches to find room on their payrolls for people trying to get off the dole.

"The president has always said that the welfare reform legislation was a step -- it was not the end of the journey," Lewis said.

The push for federal agencies to hire welfare recipients was launched last month, when the president, in his weekly radio broadcast, gave agencies 30 days to develop recruitment and hiring plans. Gore is overseeing the effort.

Clinton specifically suggested that agencies invoke an existing trainee program that allows agencies hiring entry-level workers to duck most of the red tape normally involved in government hiring.

At the end of the three years, they may be converted to career civil-service status and promoted.

OREGON'S WELFARE CASELOAD

Jan. 1993	117,656
Jan. 1994	116,390
Jan. 1995	107,610
Jan. 1996	92,182
Jan. 1997	66,919

Caseloads in Oregon -43%



Arkansas Club of Oregon, organized in 1984 is known for serving over three hundred free Thanksgiving dinners, their Adopt A Needy Family for Christmas, Annual Tea, and Formal Ball. Members front row: Pearl Wilson, Glenda Bennefield, Ethel Holmes, Alice Clayton, Mary L. Cooms. Back row: Paul Knawls, Wesley Lowe, Cortez Samuel, President Charles Green, Marge Moore, Tommy Ray Smith, Thomas Moore. (Not in photo) Belinda Warren, Mary Alice Britt and Authur Harris.

JOBS Plus Shows Positive Impact on Unemployed

The Oregon Employment Department released new data that show a state program, better known as a welfare-reform effort, has had a dramatic impact in helping unemployed Oregonians return to work.

The statistics show 585 unemployed people successfully have used JOBS Plus during the past

eight months, earning paychecks rather than receiving unemployment payments from the state. Including welfare recipients, a total of 1,914 people had found work through JOBS Plus since the program went statewide in July 1996.

Employment Department officials said the high number of unemployed placed through JOBS Plus was espe-

cially impressive because, in most areas of the state, welfare recipients receive job-placement priority over those receiving unemployment assistance. In addition to JOBS Plus placements over the eight-month period, the Employment Department found work for 11,797 unemployed Oregonians, placing them in jobs that have no subsidy from the state

program. "Our emphasis is helping get unemployed workers back in unsubsidized jobs," said Virlena Crosley, director of the Employment Department. "But JOBS Plus is an excellent tool for helping many workers get back on the job, especially those likely to exhaust their unemployment benefits."

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