

AVOIDING ANOTHER GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida [Mr. WELDON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELDON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak out about an important initiative that I will be supporting next week and have been supporting up until now, which is an effort to avoid another Government shutdown. There is a disaster appropriations bill that should be coming to the floor next week, and I support an initiative to attach a feature to that appropriations bill that would be a safety measure to avoid another Government shutdown. The gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. GEKAS] has been the primary mover behind this, and I rise to speak out strongly in support of this initiative.

I believe that the Government shutdowns that we had last year were generally agreed by people on both sides of the aisle as well as the President and the Vice President to have been counterproductive and to have been something that we should have avoided. And we have an excellent opportunity right now to attach an amendment to this appropriations bill that simply stated what it would do is, it would in the event that we cannot reach agreement with the White House on an appropriations bill, that the Government would stay open at a given funding level, whether it is 100 percent or 98 percent of the previous year's funding level, so that we do not get into this scenario where the Government is shut down.

Mr. Speaker, as many Americans know, on September 30, the previous year's appropriation bill expires, and we need a new appropriations bill to go into effect on October 1. This continuing resolution or safety measure that I am talking about tonight would simply keep the Government open. A safety CR would ensure that on October 1 all of the appropriations bills that have not been signed into law, such as those that fund the Veterans' Administration, NASA, the Social Security Administration, to make sure Social Security checks continue to get funded, as well as other programs that affect retirees, all Federal agencies that would be covered by this safety CR would be able to stay open at that level of funding which they received last year or, if it is agreed, to be slightly below the previous year's level of funding.

I think that this measure has several good, important features, one of which, it ensures that both Congress and the President negotiate in good faith and that they do not use a threat of a Government shutdown as a bargaining tool or bargaining chip, so to speak.

Let me answer a couple of questions first off. Many people are asking, is this a new concept? Is passing a continuing resolution a new concept? No, it is not. We have passed 53 different continuing resolutions in the Congress since 1982. So this is not a new concept

at all. I believe that this is good preventative medicine.

Some people are asking, why is it really needed? Well, last year we experienced several Government shutdowns, and we all agreed that it was just a very, very ineffective thing to do. I believe that this continuing resolution attached to the disaster bill makes good sense. I believe that the Government shutdowns in many ways was a disaster for many of the agencies that were affected by it. And by passing this safety CR, attaching it to the supplemental bill that will come up next week, we will make sure that the Government stays open and many of the people who are dependent on the Federal Government in many ways will continue to be able to have, whether it is in the form of a Social Security check or whether it is in the form of disaster relief, they will be able to continue to use those resources. Therefore, I encourage all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle as well as the White House to support the safety CR.

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LEGISLATION CORRECTING FLAWS IN NEW WELFARE LAW

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. STEARNS). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California [Ms. WOOLSEY] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, today we debated new ways to punish juvenile offenders, but last Congress the Republican majority enacted a welfare reform law that punishes children whose only crime is being poor. It is time for us to address the problems in the new welfare law.

So today I, along with my colleague, Delegate ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON from the District of Columbia, introduced two pieces of legislation that would correct some of the flaws in the new welfare legislation. We did this to give parents and kids on welfare a fighting chance.

Mr. Speaker, I am a former welfare mother, so I understand what goes on inside a welfare mother's mind. The main thing is anxiety. Will there be enough food for our children? Are my kids safe at home and at school? Am I doing what is best for them? Will I ever be able to get out of this mess?

These questions have always been tough to answer, but the new welfare law has made it even tougher. Parts of this law actually penalize moms who are trying to protect their children and improve their prospects for a better future.

So today, Delegate NORTON and I introduced two essential bills aimed at correcting serious flaws in the law. Our bills give welfare moms a fighting chance. One bill helps ensure that the children of welfare mothers are safe, as we wish all of our children to be; the other gives moms on welfare the educational opportunities that the rest of us take for granted.

The first bill is called the home alone bill. It is called that because it is aimed at preventing kids from being left home alone, unsupervised and unsafe. Right now, under this welfare bill that was passed, moms with kids age 6 and above can be forced to leave their children at home while they work, even if there is no suitable child care available. In fact, if they do not go to work, no matter that they have to leave their children home alone, they lose their welfare benefits.

Our bill is very simple. It raises the age from 6 years old to 11 years old. It protects kids and it protects their moms. This is really not asking too much. Would any of us put up with being required to leave a 6-year-old home alone? No, we would not.

Mr. Speaker, welfare recipients generally live in the poorest neighborhoods, neighborhoods where child care is not always available. That leaves children to the school of the streets, a tough school, a school known for its lessons in drugs, violence and crime. Home alone, if we are to protect a generation of children, should not be. There should be no place like it for our children.

The second bill, one that we introduced today also, allows welfare recipients to meet the work requirements of the new welfare law by acquiring the skills needed for permanent employment. It lets education qualify as work under the new welfare law. Americans have long realized that education is the door to success, but our new welfare law has basically told welfare recipients that the only door open to them is the employees' entrance to McDonald's. And, Mr. Speaker, statistics show that, even though low-paying jobs are easily lost during bad economic times.

How did I get off welfare? I had determination and I had an education. But only 32 percent of welfare recipients have a high school diploma. Only 10 percent ever attended a college class. Let us not condemn people who are striving to get off welfare to a lifetime of low wages and drudgery. Let us not condemn their children to the rules of the streets.

If we want welfare recipients to work, let us make welfare reform work for them. If we want the poor to aspire to a better life, let us make it attainable for them. That is what our bill does, Mr. Speaker. It makes education qualify as work under the new welfare law. It moves us closer to what welfare reform is supposed to be, permanent self-sufficiency.

These two bills are just the start. In coming months to Progressive Caucus will introduce other legislation designed to assist welfare recipients to get off welfare permanently, and they will be intended to help people get off welfare through jobs that pay a livable wage, jobs that they can support their families on.

These two bills that we introduced today correct some of the flaws in the welfare law, and we plan to fight hard

to see that these laws in these bills will be enacted. I personally plan to keep fighting for welfare moms and their families.

WELFARE REFORM BILL NEEDS REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia [Ms. NORTON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman from California [Ms. WOOLSEY] for the way in which she has worked to put welfare reform back on the 105th Congress' map and to leave no stone unturned and to put on notice this Congress that reform of the welfare system has yet to come.

"If at first you do not succeed," the cliché goes. Well, we have not succeeded and what we are going to do is try harder. The welfare reform bill needs reform. The only question is when are we going to do it. The flaws that are revealing themselves are already legion.

Congress has taken a wait for the crisis attitude. That is of course the way we do business in a number of areas. When it comes to children, particularly given all the pro-family rhetoric that adorns this hall every day, one would think that we must move before the crisis.

The gentlewoman from California, who is cochairing with me a task force to introduce an omnibus bill of reforms, has given an indication of the kinds of bills the omnibus bill will contain. Rather than repeat more about those bills, let me give other examples as well.

Let us do first things first. The President has offered forth 10,000 jobs he controls in his executive agencies for welfare recipients. It is Congress' move now. What will we do?

I have a bill that I have introduced on March 12 that would encourage every Member to offer a full-time job in her office to a welfare recipient. In order to accommodate this, the House would increase staff allotments by one, but not our budget. Many Members could then hire a welfare recipient. They might not otherwise be able to do so, especially Members who come from districts that are broadly spaced through rural areas or large States.

But if we said to the Member, or if the Member knows that she has the money but needs the staff member, at no cost to the government, we could do our part. I do not see how in the world we can continue to monitor welfare reform if we do not step up the way the President has. We must lead by example. If we mean it, we have to do it first.

I expect that the omnibus bill will contain a number of correctives. Let me give examples.

I will be introducing an anti-displacement bill. There is a perverse effect here, Mr. Speaker. What we are

finding is that people who have gone out and gotten their own low-paying jobs are being displaced by welfare recipients. If that is not a perverse effect, I do not know what is.

Two similarly situated youngsters in the District of Columbia gets pregnant at 16. One goes and finds her own job in the hotel industry and the other sits at home. Maybe she sits at home because she does not have a babysitter, maybe she does it for other reasons. But the fact is there is an incentive for employers to hire the young woman who went out and got her own job, so the employer displaces the woman who went out and got it herself. We cannot have that. It is not what anybody intended.

I will be introducing an anti-displacement bill so that similarly situated people will not feel that I have to go get on welfare in order to get a job; that is the way to do it. The message is go out and get your own job, and only if you cannot get one should you be on welfare at all.

Mr. Speaker, I have a bill that pertains to the District of Columbia, which does not have a State but has a State quota which it cannot possibly meet. By 2002 every State has to have 50 percent of all its families in work or work activities. The State of New York or the State of California or the State of Wyoming, for that matter, will gather them from all over the State. No other State has to gather that whole 50 percent from a central city. It cannot be done.

My bill would give the District no preference. It would simply say that using a formula, which we extract from what other inner cities have done, we say that the District has to fill that number and not a number that is given to an entire State.

I will be introducing a bill to exempt relative caretakers from the 20 percent rule. Twenty percent of cost can be exempted from work activity. Surely we do not mean to say that a grandmother has to go out and find a job. These are effects that are beginning to come through. These are reforms that need to be done. I expect to do so.

CELEBRATING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN AMERICAN FAMILY LIFE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from North Carolina [Mrs. CLAYTON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, on Sunday we will observe Mother's Day, a day when we pause to celebrate the role of women in the life of American families. While celebrating the roles of women we also essentially celebrate infant and children, the true symbol of motherhood.

It is, therefore, appropriate, in light of this celebration, that we examine the Federal programs that affect women, infants and children. It is appropriate at this time when we revere mothers, their infants, their children,

the foundation of American families, that we examine the impact of our relevant action in Congress.

The most relevant action is the current debate over funding for the nutritional program for women, infants and children, the WIC program. Mr. Speaker, WIC works. The data shows that for every dollar spent on the WIC program, between \$2 and \$4 are saved in health care costs, yet some 180,000 women and children face the loss of this vital support that has been proven effective because some would imbalance the lives of thousands of women, infants and children in order to balance the book of a few.

On April 24 of this year the majority on the House Committee on Appropriations voted to provide only \$38 million in special supplementary funds for the WIC program. The President had asked for \$76 million as a compromise for the \$100 million in his original request.

If the supplemental funding is not provided at the level requested, thousands of current participants will be dropped from the program. The shortfall in funding could not be anticipated. Milk prices, for example, have grown faster than was projected. Consequently, program costs have grown. The additional \$38 million needed to reach the \$76 million request is a sound investment in the future of our Nation.

The WIC program provides nutritional assistance to poor women, infants and children up to the age of 5 who are at nutritional risk. This assistance, as I indicated, has proven to be effective in reducing low birth weight babies, infant mortality, and child anemia.

WIC program funding has also been cited as a source of improving early learning abilities in children. In short, Mr. Speaker, the WIC program really pays for itself and advantages America.

Of the 104 million women in America within the age range of childbearing, some 74 million are mothers. On average, these women bear close to three children during their lifetime. They produce the children who become the laborers and leaders for the future. They produce the children who become the Members of Congress generation after generation.

Mother's Day, therefore, is not about a few flowers, a box of candy or a restaurant dinner. Mother's Day is about honoring and respecting those persons, the women of America, who play a significant role in the life of our Nation.

It seems to me that the best way to celebrate Mother's Day is to honor all mothers. Poor mothers have produced productive children. The WIC program is not charity, the WIC program is a chance, a chance for our children who happen to be born in poverty to have sufficient nurturing to carry the oppression of poverty to the opportunity that America is offered. It is the chance any child has when a healthy start is available to them.

□ 1900

Mr. Speaker, the WIC Program works. Let us make it work for all of