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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. FLETCHER).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
April 23, 2002.

I hereby appoint the Honorable ERNIE FLETCHER to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 23, 2002, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) for 5 minutes.

WELFARE REFORM

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring a little good news to the floor this morning on the subject of welfare reform. When the 1996 welfare reform bill was debated in Congress, scholars across this country, legislators at the State and Federal level, in the Senate and the House alike, predicted that a welfare system which demanded work, imposed sanctions, and operated under time restrictions would result in huge declines in family income. One Member of Congress went so

far as to say that the 1996 legislation was, quote, the most brutal act of social policy since reconstruction, end quote.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we now have the benefit of time and we have the benefit of the U.S. Census Bureau data on family income and poverty for the year 2000, thereby allowing informed judgments in the debate on welfare reform and, of course, its benefits to the poor. This new data suggests great strides have been made since 1996. For the seventh year in a row, poverty is down. Even more, African American and Hispanic households had their lowest poverty rates ever. And the overall child poverty rate was lower than in any year since 1976.

During the debate in 1996, the Urban Institute predicted that if this bill was enacted, the 1996 reforms would cast another 1 million children into poverty. Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, nearly 3 million children have been lifted out of poverty since 1996. The African American child poverty rate and the poverty rate for children living with single mothers are both at their lowest points in United States history. In fact, child poverty has declined more than twice as much during the economic recovery of the 1990s as it did during the economic recovery of the 1980s.

Welfare reform has removed the "expectation-less" public safety net that served more as a hindrance than a motivational tool. As required by the 1996 law, States have overhauled their work requirements. As a result, in fiscal year 2000, the percentage of working welfare recipients reached an all-time high, up to 33 percent from 11 percent in 1996. The poorest 40 percent of single-mother families increased their earnings by about \$2,300 per family on average between 1995 and 1999. Many single mothers leaving welfare told researchers and reporters that not only were their children proud of their

work, and she was proud of them, but they felt pride in their accomplishments as well.

Welfare reform has positively affected both the recipient and well-intentioned yet often misguided programs. Program leaders have realized that offering material goods and money is no substitute for personal engagement, instruction, and mentoring. The previous welfare system unintentionally engendered dependency and encouraged irresponsibility. Today's welfare-to-work mentoring programs are established to reach impoverished city residents beyond just monetary support. It is a way of recapturing a commitment to others.

While social welfare policies primarily affect various individual aid recipients, they also affect the families of the working poor, the governmental agencies administering welfare programs, and institutions of civil society, including social service nonprofit organizations. However, welfare reform's most profound influence is seen in its effect on our families. Reform is assisting parents in becoming responsible role models. The resulting positive influence for the children is immeasurable.

Mr. Speaker, the critics were wrong. Millions of families have been lifted from poverty by trading their welfare check for a paycheck. As we begin to reauthorize the welfare programs enacted in 1996, let our vision for independence rather than dependence be maintained. Surely we have seen a revolution in how government addresses the needs of the poor through assistance and empowerment. However, the real success belongs to the individual who took responsibility for themselves and their families.

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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