

Let's end the cycle of welfare dependence

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June 8, 1934, President Roosevelt told Congress, "These three great objectives—the security of the home, the security of livelihood, and the security of social insurance—are, it seems to me, a minimum of the promise that we can offer to the American people. They constitute a right which belongs to every individual and every family willing to work."

August 14, 1935, the president signed the new Social Security act into law. He said, "This social security measure gives at least some protection to 30 millions of our citizens who will reap direct benefits through unemployment compensation, through old-age pensions and through increased services for the protection of children and the prevention of ill health."

With his signature, he created the basis for the federally-funded welfare system.

Aid to Families with Dependent Children was added in 1936; in 1964 the food stamp program for low income households was created. In 1965, Medicaid was created to pay the medical bills of AFDC-qualified families, as well as the disabled and destitute elderly.

In 1974, the Supplemental Security Income component was added to provide income to the disabled, blind and needy elderly. In August of 1996, however, Congress passed and President Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act.

The law essentially ended federally-funded welfare, which was now left up to individual states to administer. Since its inception, however—in virtually every phase of its existence—welfare has received a lot of criticism.

The problem is that while it was designed to be a safety net of sorts for families that suddenly found themselves jobless and penniless, it can easily be taken advantage of and used as a primary income source and overall way of life. Dependence on welfare doesn't just affect the person using it, but his or her children as well.

Take a typical single mother raising two children while working at a minimum wage job. While she may be able to eke out a meager existence between her income and

welfare, her children will grow up with a disadvantage when compared to children coming from median income homes.

Countless studies have shown children from impoverished homes do not do as well in school as other children and they are more prone to drug and alcohol problems as well as being more susceptible to gang influence. Part of it may be the fact their parents are always working and aren't around to raise their children properly.

Part of it may be due the fact the children are not receiving proper nutrition, or part of it may be due to the fact their parents—in some cases—simply don't care. These are the so-called welfare families, the ones content to live off of the government for their entire lives.

The end result is the same; children from perpetual welfare families are far more likely, statistically speaking, to end up on welfare themselves. Welfare families are typically stuck in subsidized low income apartments where gangs, drugs and other crimes run rampant, further decreasing a child's chance at succeeding in life.

The cycle will not only continue, but add to the problem. The welfare rolls grow with each generation. The key to reforming welfare is breaking the cycle, working with low-income children to improve their performance in school and desire to succeed.

The approach we need to have is two-pronged. First, we need to have better policing in low income neighborhoods by landlords, tenants and actual police to cut down on the gangs, drugs and crime. Second, we need to improve the education system to ensure children from low-income families succeed.

Welfare should be available for those that need it, but let's work at getting the perpetual welfare cycle broken by intervening in the lives of low-income children. Our children are indeed our future. We need to prepare them to be successful and not to be dependent on the welfare system.

Only then will we be able to break the cycle of welfare dependence and enact true welfare reform.

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