

HON. RON PAUL OF TEXAS IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES February 13, 2003
Oppose the Federal Welfare State

Mr. Speaker, no one can deny that welfare programs have undermined America's moral fabric and constitutional system. Therefore, all those concerned with restoring liberty and protecting civil society from the maw of the omnipotent state should support efforts to eliminate the welfare state, or, at the very least, reduce federal control over the provision of social services. Unfortunately, the misnamed Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act (H.R. 4) actually increases the unconstitutional federal welfare state and thus undermines personal responsibility, the work ethic, and the family.

H.R. 4 reauthorizes the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant program, the main federal welfare program. Mr. Speaker, increasing federal funds always increases federal control, as the recipients of the funds must tailor their programs to meet federal mandates and regulations. More importantly, since federal funds represent resources taken out of the hands of private individuals, increasing federal funding leaves fewer resources available for the voluntary provision of social services, which, as I will explain in more detail later, is a more effective, moral, and constitutional means of meeting the needs of the poor.

H.R. 4 further increases federal control over welfare policy by increasing federal mandates on welfare recipients. This bill even goes so far as to dictate to states how they must spend their own funds! Many of the new mandates imposed by this legislation concern work requirements. Of course, Mr. Speaker, there is a sound argument for requiring recipients of welfare benefits to work. Among other benefits, a work requirement can help welfare recipients obtain useful job skills and thus increase the likelihood that they will find productive employment. However, forcing welfare recipients to work does raise valid concerns regarding how much control over one's life should be ceded to the government in exchange for government benefits.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, it is highly unlikely that a "one-size-fits-all" approach dictated from Washington will meet the diverse needs of every welfare recipient in every state and locality in the nation. Proponents of this bill claim to support allowing states, localities, and private charities the flexibility to design welfare-to-work programs that fit their particular circumstances. Yet, this proposal constricts the ability of the states to design welfare-to-work programs that meet the unique needs of their citizens. I also question the wisdom of imposing as much as \$11 billion in unfunded mandates on the states at a time when many are facing a fiscal crisis.

As former Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura pointed out in reference to this proposal's effects on Minnesota's welfare-to-welfare work program, "We know what we are doing in Minnesota works. We have evidence. And our way of doing things has broad support in the state. Why should we be forced by the federal government to put our system at risk?" Why indeed, Mr. Speaker, should any state be forced to abandon its individual welfare programs because a group of self-appointed experts in Congress, the federal bureaucracy, and inside-the-beltway think tanks have decided there is only one correct way to transition people from welfare to work?

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 4 further expands the reach of the federal government by authorizing approximately \$10 million dollars for new "marriage promotion" programs. I certainly recognize how the welfare state has contributed to the decline of the institution of marriage. As an ob-gyn with over 30 years of private practice. I know better than most the importance of stable, two parent families to a healthy society. However, I am skeptical, to say the least, of claims that government education programs can fix the deep-rooted cultural problems responsible for the decline of the American family.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, federal promotion of marriage opens the door for a level of social engineering that should worry all those concerned with preserving a free society. The federal government has no constitutional authority to promote any particular social arrangement; instead, the founders recognized that people are better off when they form their own social arrangements free from federal interference. The history of the failed experiments with welfarism and socialism shows that government can only destroy a culture; when a government tries to build a culture, it only further erodes the people's liberty.

H.R. 4 further raises serious privacy concerns by expanding the use of the "New Hires Database" to allow states to use the database to verify unemployment claims. The New Hires Database contains the name and social security number of everyone lawfully employed in the United States. Increasing the states' ability to identify fraudulent unemployment claims is a worthwhile public policy goal. However, every time Congress authorizes a new use for the New Hires Database it takes a step toward transforming it into a universal national database that can be used by government officials to monitor the lives of American citizens.

As with all proponents of welfare programs, the supporters of H.R. 4 show a remarkable lack of trust in the American people. They would have us believe that without the federal government, the lives of the poor would be "nasty, brutish and short." However, as scholar Sheldon Richman of the Future of Freedom Foundation and others have shown, voluntary charities and organizations, such as friendly societies that devoted themselves to helping those in need,

flourished in the days before the welfare state turned charity into a government function.

Today, government welfare programs have supplemented the old-style private programs. One major reason for this is that the policies of high taxes and inflationary Federal Reserve money imposed on the American people in order to finance the welfare state have reduced the income available for charitable giving. Many over-taxed Americans take the attitude toward private charity that "I give at the (tax) office."

Releasing the charitable impulses of the American people by freeing them from the excessive tax burden so they can devote more of their resources to charity, is a moral and constitutional means of helping the needy. By contrast, the federal welfare state is neither moral nor constitutional. Nowhere in the Constitution is the federal government given the power to level excessive taxes on one group of citizens for the benefit of another group of citizens. Many of the founders would have been horrified to see modern politicians define compassion as giving away other people's money stolen through confiscatory taxation. In the words of the famous essay by former Congressman Davy Crockett, this money is "Not Yours to Give."

Voluntary charities also promote self-reliance, but government welfare programs foster dependency. In fact, it is in the self-interest of the bureaucrats and politicians who control the welfare state to encourage dependency. After all, when a private organization moves a person off welfare, the organization has fulfilled its mission and proved its worth to donors. In contrast, when people leave government welfare programs, they have deprived federal bureaucrats of power and of a justification for a larger amount of taxpayer funding.

In conclusion, H.R. 4 furthers federal control over welfare programs by imposing new mandates on the states, which furthers unconstitutional interference in matters best left to state and local governments, and individuals. Therefore, I urge my colleagues to oppose it. Instead, I hope my colleagues will learn the lessons of the failure of the welfare state and embrace a constitutional and compassionate agenda of returning control over the welfare programs to the American people.