

**TANF FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**  
*A Q & A with Current and Former Elected Officials*

**SPOTLIGHT ON POVERTY AND OPPORTUNITY**, a bipartisan initiative to promote dialogue and action to reduce poverty and improve economic opportunity, recently launched a new question-and-answer commentary series about TANF. Over a span of six weeks, a diverse group of former and current elected officials provided their insights about TANF's strengths and weaknesses in reducing poverty and improving opportunity in America.

A bipartisan group of policymakers including United States Representative Jim McDermott (D-WA), former Indianapolis Mayor Stephen Goldsmith (R), Ohio Governor Ted Strickland (D), former Wisconsin Governor Scott McCallum (R), Delaware Lieutenant Governor Matt Denn (D), Delaware State Senator Liane Sorenson (R-6), and Savannah Mayor Otis Johnson (D) have each answered three questions about the program. The contributors examined such topics as the effect of the program's employment restrictions and the impact of other work supports also expanded in the 1990s, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit. Participants also discussed how to ensure that all eligible families have access to TANF benefits and that recipients are able to gain the skills necessary for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs.

**Here is some of what they said:**

We need to change course and actually help low-income families rather than ignore them. To achieve that goal, we need policies that value poverty reduction over caseload reduction.

—*Representative Jim McDermott*

It is not so much a question of what is the best work support, but rather, how can we use and improve work supports so that families have the most opportunities to succeed.

—*Ohio Governor Ted Strickland*

The recession has been dubbed a "game-changer" for TANF, and this is certainly true, but the potential is there for the program to still be helpful to those in need.

—*Former Indianapolis Mayor Stephen Goldsmith*

Invest more resources and expertise first in evaluating what's working and what's not...Do not focus on outputs but on behavioral change; bring together business leaders, academics [and] TANF recipients. —*Savannah Mayor Otis Johnson*

To read the full series, visit [www.spotlightonpoverty.org](http://www.spotlightonpoverty.org).

To be alerted when new contributions are posted, sign up for weekly *Spotlight* e-grams, which also offer the latest news, research and commentary on poverty and opportunity. Subscribe at [www.spotlightonpoverty.org/sign\\_up.aspx](http://www.spotlightonpoverty.org/sign_up.aspx).

*SPOTLIGHT ON POVERTY AND OPPORTUNITY is a non-partisan initiative aimed at ensuring that our political leaders take significant actions to reduce poverty and increase opportunity in the United States. We bring together diverse perspectives from the political, policy, advocacy and foundation communities to engage in an ongoing dialogue focused on finding genuine solutions to the economic hardship confronting millions of Americans.*

Below is a snapshot of the *Spotlight* website, March 8, 2010 ([www.spotlightonpoverty.org](http://www.spotlightonpoverty.org)).

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Governor Ted Strickland, former Indianapolis Mayor Stephen Goldsmith, Savannah Mayor Otis Johnson, and former Wisconsin Governor Scott McCallum offer their thoughts

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