

Committee on Ways and Means

The Dire Predictions Were Wrong; Welfare Reform is Successful

“There is an even higher precedent that we profess to follow in our Judeo-Christian nation. The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament Messiah made plain God’s mandate to protect the poor and the weak and the young. The Senate and the House welfare bills do not meet this test.”

*-Marian Wright Edelman,
“Say No to This Welfare ‘Reform’,”
Washington Post, November 3, 1995*

“If the work requirements are not met, and that means the people do not have jobs and families then get cut off because of the time limits in the bill, then what happens? What do these people do with their children? Do we put them on trains and send them out West? Do we scoop them out of alleys and auction them off? What are we going to do with the children?..Do we then put them in orphanages, as the Speaker suggested?”

-former Sen. Moseley-Braun, floor debate, August 1, 1996

“A Republican welfare bill...will throw millions of children out on the street without doing anything to move people from welfare to work.”

*-Democratic Leader Rep. Richard A. Gephardt,
floor debate, March 21, 1995*

“If Attila the Hun were alive today and elected to Congress, he would be delighted with this bill that is before us today and proud to cast his vote for it. H.R. 4, the Personal Responsibility Act, is the most callous, coldhearted and mean-spirited attack on this country’s children that I have ever seen in my life.”

-former Rep. Cardiss Collins, floor debate, March 21, 1995

“It grieves me to be here this evening to see the end of a period of almost 60 years in which this country’s belief in its responsibility to the poor is going to be shattered...This is not reform. This is destruction of the basic guarantees of our democracy.”

-Rep. Patsy T. Mink, floor debate, July 17, 1996

“This is a cruel piece of legislation. It punishes the children, the innocent children, because of the errors of their parent or parents. It punishes them not just at birth but it punishes some of them for a lifetime, and certainly it punishes others through all of their childhood era. It will deprive them of food, of clothing, of housing, of education, of love.”

-former Rep. Sam Gibbons, floor debate, March 21, 1995

“The welfare bill will destroy [America’s] state of grace. In its place will come massive and deadly poverty, sickness, and all manner of violence. People will die, businesses will close, infant mortality will soar, everyone who can will move. Working- and middle-class communities all over America will become scary, violent wastelands created by a government that decided it has no obligations to its neediest citizens. In such a landscape, each of us becomes either predator or prey.”

-Jill Nelson, Nation magazine, August 26, 1996

“According to the Urban Institute, 3,500,000 children will be dropped from the rolls in 2001. By 2005, 4,896,000 children will be cut off. The Urban Institute has also estimated, in a report released just last Friday, July 26, that this bill will cause 2.6 million persons to fall below the poverty line; 1.1 million of those impoverished will be children. To say nothing of those persons already living in poverty. They will be pushed even further below the poverty line; The average loss in income for families already below the poverty line will be \$1,040 per year. I note that the Urban Institute's estimates are based on quite conservative assumptions, so the actual impact could well be even worse than predicted.”

-former Sen. Moynihan, floor debate, August 1, 1996

““This legislation is the biggest betrayal of children and the poor since the Children’s Defense Fund began. President Clinton’s signature on this pernicious bill makes a mockery of his pledge not to hurt children,’ (CDF President Marian Wright) Edelman said. ‘This act will leave a moral blot on his presidency and on our nation that will never be forgotten. Today marks a tragic end to our national legacy of commitment to our most vulnerable children – this is truly a moment of shame for all Americans’.”

-Children’s Defense Fund press release, August 22, 1996

“I am reminded of a quote by the great theologian, Martin Niemoller, during World War II: In Germany, they came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up...I urge my colleagues, open your eyes. Read the proposal. Read the small print. Read the Republican contract. They are coming for the children. They are coming for the poor. They are coming for the sick, the elderly, and the disabled....I say to my colleagues—you have the ability, the capacity, the power—to stop this onslaught.”

-Rep. John Lewis, floor debate, March 21, 1995

“The reason Republicans want to limit debate on this issue is because they know that they are not telling the truth. They get incensed every time somebody mentions Nazi Germany in relation to what they want to do to poor people in this country. Let me say, Hitler had a minister of propaganda that said ‘Tell a lie, tell it big enough, tell it often enough, and it will become the truth.’ I say they ought to be ashamed, and they ought to go back into history and look and see if it is close to what Adolf Hitler did to people in that country. Let me say, if their level of frustration is such that they think that all of the problems of this country depend on what is happening in welfare, and if this does not work, if their frustration stays there, what is next? Castration? Sterilization? After that, I hate to say what is next, if they continue to be as frustrated as they are today.”

-former Rep. William Clay, floor debate, March 22, 1995