

Testimony For Work and Other Welfare Goals

August 4, 2011

I could not help but notice that on the front page of your Ways and Means website is a BIG announcement proudly proclaiming: "OBAMA SLAMS THE DOOR ON NEW TAXES!!!!"

You may not like what I have to testify about, but you can rely on it being the truth for many of us.

There is a misguided assumption that is really nothing new and is not true. This assumption is that poverty is a choice when in fact poverty is an *institution* based on racism, disabilities, sexism, ageism and classism. This misled assumption has been devastating for the poor. Poverty is an extremely destructive institution for which you are authorized as elected officials to dismantle since it hurts millions of American citizens.

But institutions are kept in place for a reason; because they benefit *somebody*, and in this case poverty very much benefits the upper classes. Whether it is for the tax breaks they get for those mega-non-profits who spend on the average of \$67,000 per client managing government services that are on the average of a \$1000, while their relatives are paid 6 figures to manage them, or the outright tax breaks you give for their investments, they are not making the sacrifices for taxes that the poor pay or the low wages that are paid for work that deserves more.

I wish that "slamming the door on new taxes" were true for the poorest of the poor in your perspective states. They will now face the additional burden of even **more** "trickle down" state taxing that will hurt low income families and the elderly in your districts. Here is a state-by-state synopsis of the terrible tax burden already being imposed for taxes on the poor. It shows that that *in the entire nation* they pay on the average of 3-5 X the proportion of their meager incomes in taxes than our richest 1%: http://itepnet.org/state_reports/whopays.php.

I would also like to add that in the near decade since you lowered taxes for these same rich and corporations that you seem to think will bring us jooooobs. But during that time with those same breaks, Americans LOST jobs every month, sometimes by the MILLIONS. Why do you think another tax break will make it any different? Isn't 8 years enough to know it won't?

While most of us who are poor deeply believe it is patriotic to pay taxes and want to contribute, forcing us into lifelong poverty with McJobs often far below the poverty level, should come with some important caveats mentioned at the end of my testimony. And besides all the other contributions the poor make to this country, it should be considered if only because all over the nation the poorest families pay the highest proportion of their meager incomes in taxes and thus carry the hardest burdens to pay them.

To further muddy the waters, there are no jobs that low income families can find so they can more easily shoulder these additional tax burdens. Of course, since Congress seems to think it is such *wonderful news* that YOU won't pay these taxes, and your rich friends won't pay them, guess who will? Some of these taxes will even be paid out of your welfare grants, literally out of the mouths of babies and their families who live 5 X below the poverty level ~ these are some of the folks your states will depend upon for revenue. And believe me while you may think \$1,500 a year is "chump change" to you, to a poor family this "chump change" will mean the difference between freezing during the winter, shoes to keep feet dry, coats to keep warm on the school ground during recess, or something more nutritious than a meal of mac and cheese for dinner.

In my state at this time, the poorest workers and welfare mothers pay about 17% of their incomes in state taxes. Since we live where two of the richest men in the world live, if just ONE of these rich guys paid the 17% of their incomes that a welfare mother pays, we would be well out of our \$9 billion deficit. We would actually be in the black by a couple billion dollars, and he would still have his \$50 billion or so to "eke" out his living. If ALL our upper 1% in our state paid the same 17% that a welfare mother pays, that money would go through the roof as to all we could do with our infrastructure, schools, jobs, government, and the world.

https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.itepnet.org%2Fwp2009%2Fwhopays_factsheet.pdf ←-google docs

And don't get me started on those large corporations in our states, some who pay no taxes at all. Yet they are the ones who use up all our resources, wear out our infrastructure, and drain the tax coffers. It is small businesses, the poor and middle class who are paying the way for these always-in-need "persons" demanding Welfare. It is corporatist "persons" who are allowed to easily "forget" those benefits they reap that are seldom if ever shared

with the least among their own neighbors ~ such as providing jobs with livable wages. Yet they demand the most time and resources from you ~ and all of us.

One major reason for poverty with women is that few value the work for Care Giving that supposedly is done “for free” or its value to communities ~ even with those “family values” supposedly so honored. It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to calculate how much this “free” work gives or that it would take billions to re-create into institutions, which is conveniently considered “doing nothing”. Yet this “doing nothing” comes at a huge cost in lost wages for women. Labor statistics say this loss is over **\$270,000 per woman’s work life** ~ over ¼ of a million dollars lost because of this so-called “free” Care Giving that has been codified into law as “doing nothing”!

This loss is because women whether childless or not are faced with more than raising children; they also face the needed care of their elders, then care of their spouses. All this “free” care giving has been denigrated into “doing nothing” from the beginning of women’s work lives according to Welfare Reform. This traditional women’s work is unsupported, demanding that women’s “real” work is only for corporations saying, “Do you want fries with that?” rather than, “Come on Dad let’s go for a walk and exercise that knee,” or, “Son, let’s sit down and I will help you with your homework,” or, “Don’t be afraid Honey, you won’t fall, I am right beside you, here, hold my arm...”

There is despair because many of these children are fatherless, and now you want to make them motherless as well creating virtual orphans without ANY family to raise them. Their lack of solid upbringing will be BECAUSE this traditional work of womanhood is not valued and not considered a contribution to our communities when in fact it saves \$ billions. Mysteriously in contrast to those “family values” everyone talks about, somehow it is “better” to be working for a wage while someone else raises and shares family values with the next generation whom God gave to these parents to raise. Why is it “better” to work for someone else rather than with those who God has given into your care? Why is it “doing nothing” to be overseeing the upbringing of your own children who will be the ones contributing to our Social Security, fighting in our wars, and maintaining our infrastructure when we can no longer do it?

So if you believe we poor are “ignorant” and do not understand the Very Important Work you do, well then you might consider we are NOT so “ignorant” that we do not understand the impact of the consequences from the mandates being planned for us. We live them every day and we are not oblivious to the reasons for our experiences. Most poor are not substance abusers our brains are not muddled, the upper and middle classes are far worse about that, driving up health costs with their mood pills while their jogging experts and diet doctors are dying of their own “cures” themselves

As a part of this poverty *institution*, I worked in those McJobs for over 35 years to feed my family. In spite of that hard labor, we were homeless 3 X while I was working full time, with children who never recovered emotionally from their forced conditions of poverty. Even though they lived through divorce, the only thing that saved them was the love of BOTH their hard working parents working together in spite of their differences to ensure these children *never* had to choose whom to love. Better support would have been very helpful while we were raising these kids, but unfortunately many people do not see children as our country’s future, they see them as “hobbies”.

Multiply my family by millions who have lived these things since the 1980s. Now it is going to be even *worse* for the coming generations by taking away the support they desperately need such as food, energy and housing assistance. Instead you are giving that revenue to corporate “persons” who pay few if any taxes, made millions off our backs, and CREATED the unemployment situation we now have to live. We worked HARD, and never “chose” to be poor, because we poor are mostly women, minorities, disabled, and the aged. We are routinely discriminated against for advancement and equal pay, expected to be paid little to live on for our hard labor, then blamed for our “choice” to be poor ~ and we are not even being acknowledged for paying the highest proportion in taxes out of our low incomes.

It is because of those added tax burdens and expected “free labor” I have nothing to show for my employment, as many of my sisters and brothers in poverty will tell you is true for them as well. Every penny we make goes into “responsible” living such as paying those taxes, making the rent, feeding our kids, finding clothes for their backs, and keeping them warm. Indeed the only things I have to show for it are disabilities from bad work conditions, no home of my own, and depression because I could never make enough under poor working conditions that most of you would never deign to break so much as one of your manicured nails to do. As a denizen of the

working poor, I strongly identify with Sojourner Truth who said to a roomful of privileged Suffragettes, “Ain’t I a woman? I can work as hard out in the hot sun more than any man and bear a child as well!”

This is why I am an activist for the coming generations because I already *know* what their future looks like for them if we continue down this path. I have lived it and I know that people of color, and legal immigrants whom I have the privilege to know and learn from, have had it even worse. Am I angry and afraid for our futures? You bet I am! It is unjust! I am not only living it, I am seeing the next generations not even have the support I had and I worry about what will happen to the coming generations who are denied any support at all yet expected to give up their families, their homes and their souls for corporations who will throw them away when they are no longer needed.

It is NOT a good career plan for millions of families relegated to lifelong poverty with mandates that a job ~ any job ~ that is supposedly “better” than being a parent and care giver! If you insist on going down that path, you must also require in exchange that these large corporations who benefit and make millions off our backs also use some of their resources to employ us in jobs that give us the benefits and wages with training and decent employment environments embedded with chances to advance and prosper as well.

It would also do well to encourage longer educating opportunities; more than the paltry one year you seem to believe is going to bring in anything near a livable wage yet is already proven to be meaningless. At this time a Bachelor’s degree is equal to what used to be a high school degree in most entry level jobs.

Notice that I did not ask that you actually request that these “corporate persons” actually pay taxes like my impoverished sisters and brothers and I pay at 17% . See, I already read your front page that announces as to how wonderful it is that these “persons” and the rich will not have to pay taxes as millions of the poor like me pay taxes now. I know from my work as an activist for decades it is hopeless to expect you to actually consider taxing those who can well afford it. It must be with some mixed feelings that at least, while the poor are freezing they will still pay your wages while working a Mcjob that won’t pay the rent ~ even when those wages are paid back to you with a welfare grant 5 X below the poverty level.

Maybe the least you could do is beg as you do so well, that these entitled “persons” make sure some of their billions will educate and pay enough so people will not have to choose between freezing or having enough tax-rich gas to get to work. And God forbid, with the reduced safety net that the working poor, elderly and children no longer have that you gave so generously to those who don’t need it, perhaps requiring that these “corporate persons” at the very least provide livable wage jobs and education for their workers. This might be something to consider rather than leaving your TAX PAYING constituents wondering if they will be left out in the cold unable to feed anyone much less themselves, because hey, even while they shiver with growling stomachs, you know they WILL pay more than their fair share of taxes.

Sincerely,
Catherine L. Sullivan
19121 61st PL NE Apt A
Kenmore, WA 98028
Email: mntleo2@gmail.com
Phone: 1- 425-483-6421

Board member of Parents Organizing for Welfare and Economic Rights (P.O.W.E.R)