

Under the original Contract with America, this family would receive a family credit of \$1,500.

Under H.R. 1215, this family would receive a family tax credit of \$375.

Relative to the original Contract, this family will lose \$1,125.

WELFARE REFORM

HON. PAT WILLIAMS

OF MONTANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 28, 1995

Mr. WILLIAMS. Mr. Speaker, the welfare reform debate in the House was, in a word, awful.

For the most part, it was either pandering or accusative; it was partisan, it was assumptive, and like the bill itself, it was punitive.

I received the following letter from a woman, a mother, who was once a recipient of welfare. I commend it to my colleagues as a measured calm voice amidst all of this unreasonableness.

March 19, 1995.

DEAR SIR: I am writing to you concerning the future of our nation. Among that collective future lies my own individual life, which is very distant from yours. Okanogan County, where I live in central Washington state, is larger than Rhode Island and Delaware but houses a population of only 35,000 people. We are bordered by Canada on the north, and by the Colville Indian Reservation on the east. The Cascade Mountains on the west isolate us from the more well known, urban coast of Washington state. Until recently, we boasted only one traffic light in the whole county. The largest industry employers are government and agriculture—mainly apples. Despite the distance between our lives, it is not impossible that you have eaten from the many tons of apples that passed through my hands when I worked in the orchards before my children were born. Roughly 30 percent of our population here depends on welfare payments. From my vantage point it is obvious that we are about to make some big mistakes around how we look at and structure social programs.

It is not our welfare system that is the problem, it's our economic system. Our economic system divides this nation's people geographically, philosophically and in other practical ways that prevent shared problem solving. Current proposals for welfare and fiscal reform blatantly disregard the reality that there aren't enough jobs which provide adequate wages on which to raise families. As long as there are low paying jobs that need to be done—agricultural labor, for example—there will be families who can't quite get their needs met, there will be industries that are not economically viable, and there will be a need to subsidize resources for those who provide these 'chore services' to the rest of the nation. This is called reciprocity. It's an ancient human survival strategy which we seem to have forgotten.

Not only are low paying jobs a given, but our economic system itself is incompatible with family life. This is why many women with children choose to go on welfare. I'll use myself as an example. I applied for welfare benefits when my children were 3 and 4 years old and I take responsibility for making that choice. I foolishly tried to raise a family with an alcoholic husband and when it became obvious that the situation wasn't good for any of us, I chose to leave. I looked for employment that was compatible with my children's need for my presence during such a disruption in their lives, but there

was none, so I chose to go on welfare. I consider myself lucky to have had that option and intelligent for having made that decision.

One of the slanders being committed against welfare recipients right now is this ridiculous idea that welfare parents—mostly women—do not work. Even if we don't work outside the home for a salary, as parents, we work our backsides off within our homes, with little support, often under a deficit of skills, amidst extreme financial stress and in the face of growing public hostility for which political leaders are partly responsible. As long as families are impoverished they will find it difficult, if not impossible, to fully participate in their children's schools, in their communities and in larger leadership roles—where, I might add, their perspective is sorely needed. Working and middle class families do not escape this problem, either. As long as they are locked into an economic system which forces parents into full time employment positions, they will also fail to participate fully in their own home lives, in their schools, communities and social structures. When it comes to family crises like divorce, violence, substance abuse and juvenile delinquency, studies show that poor and affluent families are more alike than different. This is where the irony comes in.

Although we are segregated by our economic and class status, and although this segregation keeps us ignorant of and callous to each other's struggles, it is the common thread of parenthood that could supply the answer to many of this nation's problems. Surely this thought has occurred to some of the educated minds in the legislature! One of the only ways to solve a big problem is to break down barriers between people by involving them in a superordinate goal—a task that simply cannot be successfully completed without the participation of all persons involved. The only example I can think of where we cooperated in such a superordinate task on a national level is World War II. The reason we survived that event is because we pulled together, and that cohesion was accomplished in part by profound shifts in the way we thought about ourselves, and by having the courage to change economic and social norms. One example of this is the new economic roles women took on during the war.

As a nation, we often speak proudly of how we handled ourselves in those times. Well, parenting is our nation's contemporary superordinate goal, and at all economic and social levels, we are failing at this job because of the time deficit caused by an economic system that splits parents and children into different worlds, and because of poverty and all that it entails. Rather than inflict punitive measures on those families and individuals who are failing to thrive in our system, we need to genuinely 'invite' them into the middle class and we need to change the structure of our economic system.

I'll again use myself as an example because to some small extent I've challenged the incompatibility of poverty, employment and family life. During my first 2 years on welfare, the fact that I was not employed outside the home allowed me to participate in a lot of community volunteer work which I could do with or around my children. I ran cooperative game sessions for kids, I did volunteer library work, I tutored, I even acquired a \$5,000 grant for a community education project which I coordinated without a penny of salary. No one told me to do these things. I considered them part of my parenting job and civic duty. Finally, my children entered grade school and I entered a local community college and eventually secured a work study job. A couple years later

I fell in love with a man who is now just weeks away from becoming a certified teacher and while still on welfare, I became unexpectedly pregnant because of birth control failure.

The decisions surrounding this unplanned pregnancy were agonizing. What would happen to my schooling? Would a baby prolong my welfare dependency? Could I handle the challenge of parenting a toddler and a two teenagers at the same time? My third son is now one and half years old and looks a bit like a baby orangutan. He's the hearth around which our family gathers. Although I still receive cash welfare payments for the older boys I did not put this baby on the welfare grant even though there are laws in place that require me to do so. I have avoided it by refusing to apply for a social security card for him. His father paid for prenatal care and a midwife helped with his birth. The cost of my maternity care was roughly \$700 and it did not come out of the public coffers. I sometimes think I handle the taxpayers money better than you do.

Although I had to quit my job, I didn't miss a beat in my education. I managed one semester by bringing the baby to class but when he became too old to rock quietly on my lap during lectures, I enrolled in distance learning courses through Washington State University that allow my studies to take place from home, through taped interviews, conference calls and excruciating piles of written assignments. My work day lasts from about 6 a.m. to 11 or 12 p.m. In an otherwise family-hostile economic system, I have forged a narrow pathway that at least somewhat accommodates my need to parent my children. My education hasn't trained me for a specific job but it has refined the skills I naturally possess and it is showing me ways to use those skills. I'm in the process of starting a newsletter for stepfamilies and have recently been published for the first time. Of course, through social spending cuts, you could pull the rug out from under me right now when I'm so close to succeeding—but imagine what this nation would be like if we really acted on the lip service we give to "family values." Imagine what it would be like if parents actually had the time and resources needed to parent. In a country as affluent as ours there is no excuse for the lack of ingenuity and philanthropy evident in our economic and welfare programs.

With all due respect, some of y'all have got a lot of things mixed up. People are not poor because they're on welfare, they're poor because there aren't enough good jobs—and there never will be. Children aren't in trouble because they're innately bad, they're in trouble because their adult role models and mentors are so busy struggling to survive that kids are segregated into a world of their peers where they're left to manage, on their own, the development of values, crucial life choices, and navigation through difficult life transitions, and sometimes their very survival. And contrary to what a very misguided Washington State legislator recently stated, welfare recipients are *not* like plants. And if you cut a plant off and lay it on the ground (cut a person off of welfare and "force" them to be independent), that plant does *not* grow new roots and flourish. It dies. But it is not only in the areas of botany, biology and sociology that congressional leaders appear to need refresher courses—some appear to need a basic math lesson.

At least be honest with your constituents. Taking money from social programs is an ineffective method of saving tax money because this is not where we're over spending our tax money. Even superficial perusals of Federal budget allocations reveal this. The

money we use to help poor families access basic resources like food, housing, transportation—to jobs, I might add—and medical care, are not “discretionary moneys.” Two hundred thousand annual dollars in White House floral spending is discretionary money. Billions of dollars in corporate subsidies which don't seem to result in jobs as much as they result in inflated executive salaries is discretionary spending. Overly generous Federal pension plans and expensive military programs—those are discretionary funds. Give me a line item breakdown of the Federal budget and I can probably point out where some more of the leaks area.

We are not a stupid populace, but we are easily swayed into believing in fiscal half-truths and dramatic anti-welfare gestures because we are desperate for solutions to social and economic ills. There is no such thing as a “self made man.” Every family, every individual, who is surviving economically is doing so within a system and has an obligation to that system which supports them. The intentional misinforming of the American public concerning fiscal management is the most shameful and cowardly thing I've ever seen. I mentioned early in this letter that the perspective of welfare recipients is sorely needed in leadership roles in this country. There is probably no one more qualified by experience to streamline the Federal budget than the welfare mothers who are managing to raise children on poverty level incomes—or less.

Most of us welfare moms are adept at the basics—first we buy bread and clothe our children, second we pay our bills, and then we try to budget for health, education and “entertainment.” If there is anything left at this point—usually there isn't—we sometimes help others or try to build a small savings. Way, way, way down on our shopping list are rainy day luxuries like bombers, cow fart studies, luxurious travel accommodations, fancy luncheons, financial contributions to successful mega-corps, vacations and wars. I'd like to clarify for the record that neither myself nor any other welfare recipient I know has ever spent tax payer money on that last list of items. I don't have quite enough education to understand all the macro-economic smoke and mirrors that politicians are so fond of dazzling the public with and while I do understand our interdependent relationship with foreign markets and our desire for a healthy corporate world, I understand something even more important and basic. We're pouring our tax dollars into the top of our economic system when it's the bottom that's depleted. We need to try a “trickle up” theory.

My 11-year-old son is very bright and handsome with brown eyes and dark curly hair that he painstakingly combs straight every morning. He's a natural athlete, a straight-A student often described by his teachers as a leader, and he was recently chosen by his fellow classmates to represent them at a regional Science Olympiad. Even so, he is still a young man at risk—the son of an alcoholic and a low income mother, a child of divorce and a member of a new stepfamily. But in this world, you never know, someday one of your daughters or your granddaughters may meet and fall in love with my son.

My 10-year-old is blond, blue eyed, playful and precocious. In first grade, his language skills tested out at high school levels and fortunately, he had a teacher who gave him the opportunity to pursue independent and challenging work. Currently, he and a friend are working with the friend's father to build a robot and learn computer programming. Fortunately, his friend comes from a family with greater resources than ours, and he gets

to share experiences with this friend that I can't provide. He's a very compassionate young man, which is lucky because in this world you never know, someday your own health and well-being may depend on scientific discoveries my son and his friends are able to make.

I'd wager that our core values are pretty similar, although the way we are managing to uphold them is quite different. Please keep in mind that my children and I have been luckier than most. We have a network of friends who support us socially even though they are unable to do so financially. I brought a middle class background and a few life skills with me onto the welfare roles. Other recipients are not this fortunate. The current welfare system, despite its shortcomings, is what was allowed my children and I to thrive, and I am extremely grateful.

I don't know exactly how such an important word as ‘welfare’ took on such negative connotations. I don't know how we lost sight of the fact that parenting is a high status job at all economic levels and a primary responsibility of any society. But we're reaping the impacts of those oversights right now and we can no longer afford to pretend that private, political, and economic spheres are separable or that any of us survive independent of one another. Enclosed with this letter is a summation of ideas concerning welfare and economic reform, distilled from conversations with friends, from my own thoughts, my education and the thoughts and research of others. I challenge you to have the courage and integrity to consider some of these ideas seriously.

I have no doubt that somewhere down the road we'll recognize the need to make radical economic and social adjustments, but probably not until we've caused a lot of trauma to the individual families of this nation. Today's so called leaders who refuse to talk about the reality on which our well-being teeters and who pretend that the only thing wrong with our economy is that poor people have too much money, will eventually be exposed as greedy fools. And people like myself who look on from the fringes of society into the decaying core of its leadership will see that our concerns were right on the money—even though we didn't have much of it.

SINCERELY,

LEGISLATION PROVIDING FOR
LAND CONVEYANCE TO VIL-
LAGES WITHIN THE COOK INLET
REGION

HON. DON YOUNG

OF ALASKA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 28, 1995

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce today, at the request of six villages of the Cook Inlet region, a bill to address a long standing unfulfilled obligation of the Federal Government under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act to six Alaska Native villages within Cook Inlet region.

Nowhere in Alaska were the competing interests for land so fierce as in southcentral Alaska. Nearly 20 years ago, Cook Inlet region and its six villages entered into a series of agreements with the Department of the Interior that were intended to address the competing land interests in southcentral Alaska and, at the same time, provide for the fulfillment of the

Federal Government's obligation to them under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

This bill that I introduce is intended to fulfill the ANCSA entitlement to the Cook Inlet villages.

The villages within Cook Inlet region have worked diligently to secure from the Bureau of Land Management 29,900 acres of high priority lands selected over 20 years ago. Starting in 1979, BLM had issued a number of decisions and had taken a number of administrative steps towards conveyance of these lands. In spite of this long track record of moving toward conveyance, the Department has now indicated to the villages that it lacks authority to make the conveyances.

I am convinced that the villages of Cook Inlet have an equitable argument that the conveyances are proper, and that further delay in conveyance will cause them unnecessary economic hardship.

My legislation provides the additional authority to the Department and directs that these conveyances be made with no further delays.

REV. J. ALFRED SMITH—A VERY
SPECIAL PERSON

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 28, 1995

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr., pastor of the 4,000 member Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, California. Dr. Smith will be honored this week by the Baptist Ministers Union of Oakland and Vicinity for being a good neighbor to the citizens of Oakland.

Dr. Smith is Professor of Preaching and Christian Ministry at the American Baptist Seminary of the West and has been Pastor at Allen Temple for over 25 years. Dr. Smith holds the Th.M. degree and was granted a Doctor of Humane Letters (Honoris Causa) in 1990 from the American Baptist Seminary of the West. He also holds the D. Min. degree from the Golden Gate Theological Seminary. He is currently president of the Baptist Ministers Union.

Dr. Smith has been the recipient of many awards and commendations. He has served as President of the Progressive National Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Churches of the West. He has lectured at most of the major universities in America, including Yale, Harvard, Duke, and Stanford. He was recently listed by Ebony magazine as one of the greatest African American preachers in the United States. He was also recently named by the Oakland Tribune as “Outstanding Citizen of the Year”.

Dr. Smith has long been a leader in our community. As the Baptist Ministers Union has stated, he has moved beyond his pulpit into our communities to respond with love to the needs of all persons, irrespective of color, class, creed, gender, or sexual orientation. That is why I am proud to recognize him today. He is more than a “good neighbor”—he is the best neighbor!