

Welfare and Work

FOR TWELVE YEARS the Republicans in Washington have praised the virtue of hard work, but they have hurt hard-working Americans. They have talked about "family values," but their policies show they don't really value families. They have pledged to reform welfare, but they have no plan to put people back to work. They have put their elections first—and people last.

Millions of Americans have paid the price. Wages are flat, good jobs are scarce, and poverty has exploded. Today almost one of every five people who works full-time doesn't earn enough to keep his or her family above the poverty level. Almost one of every five children lives in poverty—a million more than ten years ago. And because of deadbeat spouses, more than one of every five single parents doesn't get adequate child support.

It's time to honor and reward people who work hard and play by the rules. That means ending welfare as we know it—not by punishing the poor or preaching to them, but by empowering Americans to take care of their children and improve their lives. No one who works full-time and has children at home should be poor anymore. No one who can work should be able to stay on welfare forever.

We can provide opportunity, demand responsibility,

and end welfare as we know it. We can give every American hope for the future.

Here's how:

End Welfare as We Know It

- *Empower people* with the education, training, and child care they need for up to two years, so they can break the cycle of dependency; expand programs to help people learn to read, get their high school diplomas or equivalency degrees, and acquire specific job skills; and ensure that their children are cared for while they learn.
- *After two years, require those who can work to go to work*, either in the private sector or in community service; provide placement assistance to help everyone find a job, and give the people who can't find one a dignified and meaningful community service job.
- *Actively promote state models that work*, like Arkansas's Project Success.
- *Guarantee affordable, quality health care to every American*—so nobody is forced to stay on welfare because going back to work would mean losing medical insurance.
- *Sign into law the Family and Medical Leave Act*, which President Bush has vetoed, to give workers the right to take twelve weeks of unpaid leave per year to care for a newborn or a sick family member—a right enjoyed by workers in every other advanced industrial nation.

Guarantee a Working Wage

- *Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit* so that no one with a family who works full-time has to raise his or

her children in poverty; make up the difference between a family's earnings and the poverty level.

- Increase the minimum wage to keep pace with inflation and enforce the prevailing wage protections contained in the Davis-Bacon Act.

- Create a *national apprenticeship-style program* by bringing business, labor, and education leaders together to offer non-college-bound students valuable skills training, with the promise of good jobs when they graduate.

- Require every employer to spend 1.5 percent of payroll for *continuing education and training* and provide training to all workers, not just executives.

Help Low-Income Americans Build Savings

- Enable low-income Americans to set up *Individual Development Accounts* to save for specific purposes such as post-secondary education, home ownership, retirement, and small business startups.

- *Eliminate foolish regulations* that discourage people receiving income maintenance from saving. It's a travesty that people on welfare who want to do right by themselves and their families can't because the government won't let them.

Stimulate Investment in Inner City and Rural Areas

- Establish a *nationwide network of community development banks*, modeled on the successful South Shore Bank in Chicago and Southern Development Bancorporation in Arkansas, to provide loans to low-income entre-

preneurs and homeowners in the inner cities. These banks will also provide advice and assistance to entrepreneurs, invest in affordable housing, and help mobilize private lenders.

- Create *urban enterprise zones* in stagnant inner cities, but only for companies willing to take responsibility. Minimize business taxes and federal regulations to provide incentives to set up shop. In return, require companies to make jobs for local residents a top priority.

- *Ease the credit crunch in our inner cities* by passing a more progressive Community Reinvestment Act to prevent redlining, and by requiring financial institutions to invest in their communities.

Educate Our Children

- Expand innovative parenting programs like Arkansas's Home Instructional Program for Pre-school Youngsters (HIPPY), which helps disadvantaged parents work with their children to *build an ethic of learning at home* that benefits both.

- *Fully fund Head Start, WIC, and other initiatives* recommended by the National Commission on Children that will help send our children to school ready to learn—programs that save the government several dollars for every one it spends.

- *Make educational opportunity a reality* by increasing Chapter One funding for schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods, setting tough standards, and helping communities open youth opportunity centers for dropouts who need a second chance.

- *Give every American the right to borrow money for*

college by maintaining the Pell grant program, scrapping the existing student loan program, and establishing a National Service Trust Fund. Those who borrow from the fund will be able to choose how to repay the balance: either as a small percentage of their earnings over time, or by serving their communities doing work their country needs.

Crack Down on Deadbeat Parents

- Report them to credit agencies, so they can't borrow money for themselves when they're not taking care of their children.
- Use the Internal Revenue Service to help collect child support.
- Start a national deadbeat databank to enable law enforcement officers to track down negligent parents more easily.
- Make it a felony to cross state lines to avoid paying child support.