

MAY 16, 2002

SCHAKOWSKY: REPUBLICAN WELFARE REFORM BILL FAILS TO PROVIDE REAL ASSISTANCE TO NEEDY FAMILIES

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today expressed disappointment that the House of Representatives approved a Republican-sponsored welfare reform bill that places *"further restrictions and requirements on those most in need and those who already face tremendous barriers to work and self-sufficiency."*

□ Schakowsky supported a Democratic alternative that would have offered real assistance to needy families.□

Below is Schakowsky's statement during debate on H.R. 4737, the TANF reauthorization bill.□

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge my colleagues to vote against HR 4737, the Republican TANF reauthorization bill.□ Anyone who looks at this bill can see that the Republican plan does not provide real assistance to needy families.□ Instead, this bill aims to place further restrictions and requirements on those most in need and those who already face tremendous barriers to work and self-sufficiency.□□

If the Republican leadership truly cared about providing assistance to needy families, it would have considered the needs of those families - the women, children, and parents who are directly affected by this program.□ Their bill would have focused on what TANF should really be about - helping families out of poverty so they will have an acceptable standard of living.□ Instead, this bill only succeeds in defining those families as statistics that should be controlled and told what to do.□□

First and foremost, the amount of funding this Republican proposal gives to TANF - the primary program in this country to help poor women and children - is pitiful.□ Last week the House passed a \$400 billion Department of Defense Authorization bill that included a \$48 billion increase.□ Not only is this the biggest increase in Defense spending since the Cold War, but it was also provided despite the fact that the Department cannot pass an audit and cannot account for \$1.2 trillion in spending.□ Yet, this increase is three times greater than the amount the Republicans propose for the TANF block grant.□ This Congress has bailed out the airlines and given a \$254 million rebate to Enron.□ It is a disgrace that we cannot give more to those in this country that need it most.□ It is a disgrace that this bill does not provide a single additional dollar in TANF funds.□ In my state of Illinois, it would cost at least an additional \$322 million in order to implement the increased work requirements and meet the child care needs that this bill would require.□□

Second, this bill neglects to help women get assistance to overcome barriers, such as

substance abuse, limited English proficiency, and domestic and sexual abuse. Instead, it requires that recipients work longer hours. Besides causing great hardship on single moms with children, this increase from a 30 hour requirement to one that demands women work 40 hours a week will likely force states to create workfare programs - programs that have been proven not to work and which threaten workers' rights to earn at least minimum wage and have other protections afforded all other workers in this country.

Third, this bill does not provide adequate training for jobs that would open the door for people to earn a living wage so they can support their families. Instead, HR 4737 takes away recipients' ability to fully engage in vocational education, often a necessary step in getting a job that pays and provides the opportunity for advancement. This bill also does not provide support to women who care for young children or children with disabilities, and instead it doubles the amount of hours women with children under six years old are required to work. Furthermore, HR 4737 continues to deny legal immigrants access to benefits, instead of allowing these families who pay taxes and work hard to receive assistance when they hit tough times.

Besides placing further restrictions on TANF recipients, HR 4737 also places further restrictions on states. Instead of helping states to be innovative in addressing the particular needs of their low-income population, this bill applies a one-size-fits-all philosophy and dramatically diminishes states rights.

And, if all that was not bad enough, this Republican bill includes a "superwaiver" provision that extends to programs far beyond TANF and could bring greater hardship to low-income people helped by these programs. For example, this provision would have adverse affects on Federal public housing and homelessness programs because the rules and regulations governing them could be swept away at the whim of the Federal agencies. In these cases, the real impact would be felt by families who would then be threatened with losing their housing assistance and being forced onto the streets. Such far-reaching changes are unacceptable, particularly given that the various Committees with jurisdiction over programs affected by this "superwaiver" did not have the opportunity to consider them nor to assess their negative impact.

But none of this should come at any surprise. This Republican bill is in line with all the other legislation this leadership and the Bush Administration have offered in this Congress, legislation that has aimed to deprive those most in need while giving to those who have plenty.

Fortunately, we have an alternative in a Democratic substitute that actually gives families the tools they need to become self-sufficient. This substitute allows women more opportunity to access vocational or post-secondary education, or go to ESL or GED classes if needed; it restores benefits to legal immigrants; it provides worker protections to all TANF recipients; it provides resources to states to foster employment advancement and promotion among recipients; it makes Puerto Rico and the territories eligible for assistance; and it gives states the incentive to actually work toward

decreasing poverty. In addition, the Democratic substitute increases childcare funding by \$11 billion dollars and accounts for inflation in TANF block grant funding.

□ □

I urge every one of my colleagues to reject the Republican bill, HR 4737, and instead, to think about all the individual lives we are affecting. HR 4737 does not provide assistance to needy families, it places arbitrary and restrictive mandates on needy families. If we truly want to help people leave poverty and become self-sufficient we must vote for the Democratic substitute and against HR 4737.