

NEWS
from
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URBAN COALITION ACTION COUNCIL STATES VIEWS ON
ADMINISTRATION'S WELFARE PROPOSALS

The following statement was issued on behalf of the Urban Coalition Action Council today by John W. Gardner, Council Chairman, following a meeting of the Council's Executive Committee in Washington, D.C.:

President Nixon has taken the initiative to reform America's outmoded welfare system. The Urban Coalition Action Council welcomes this major departure and commends the President for moving to correct the serious deficiencies of the current system.

The President's proposals are significant on several counts:

(a) They will provide assistance to the millions of working poor who are totally ignored by the present system.

(b) They will provide income to unemployed parents who are seeking work or training, thereby keeping families together. (In most states today unemployed fathers have to desert their families to make the families eligible for aid.)

(c) They remove the powerful barrier to work which is a gross defect of the present system, and introduce a positive incentive for the individual to enter the job market.

(d) Though the level of support is modest, they take the enormously important step of accepting federal responsibility to place a floor under the income of those eligible for assistance.

(e) They will provide national eligibility standards for those receiving federal assistance under the new program.

We have strongly advocated such measures and we will do all that we can to make them a legislative reality. If that is to come about, all who are concerned for the nation's future must work together to ensure that the best program we can devise is finally written into law. To assure the ultimate success of the program, it must be strengthened in every way possible during the public debate and the legislative deliberations to come. Here are some of the ways in which strengthening could be accomplished:

1. The Administration proposals could be further strengthened by raising the level of funding in order to increase the level of minimum income, to afford relief for those states and municipalities which are being crushed by the spiraling welfare burden and to include single persons and childless couples who are not now covered.

2. The plan proposed by the President exempts mothers of pre-school children from the provision requiring recipients of assistance to register for work and training. This is a step forward over the present law and should be retained. But the plan could be strengthened further if it recognized that even mothers of children over six might serve the society best by staying home and doing a good job of bringing up their children. It is a decision for the mother, not the government, to make. All evidence indicates that the number of mothers who want to work exceeds our capability to provide jobs and daycare facilities.

3. The Administration proposals can be effectively strengthened by the formulation of explicit federal standards governing work referral and wages to be paid, and by provisions to assure that present welfare recipients do not end up with a lower level of benefits than they presently receive.

4. The proposals could be made more effective if they were supplemented by a job creation program. There is a danger that the new training opportunities proposed by the President will simply become a revolving door through which potential employees pass without obtaining employment. The Coalition has long advocated a public service employment program which would solve the problem.

5. Finally, the proposal should assure that the food stamp program only be phased out as cash payments approach the minimum necessary to lift a family out of poverty.

The Urban Coalition Action Council looks forward to joining with other concerned citizens in the monumental task we now face of winning the public and political support necessary to assure enactment of constructive measures to meet these problems.

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