Obama Sabotages Welfare Reform

by Phyllis Schlafly

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President Obama on July 12 ended welfare reform, the crowning achievement of the Republican Congress of 1996. That reform succeeded in reducing the welfare rolls by almost half, and was so popular with the American people that Bill Clinton felt compelled to sign it.

The magic bullet that achieved this authentic reform was requiring able-bodied adults to work, or at least prepare for work, as a condition of receiving taxpayer handouts. This requirement imposed on welfare recipients was not only good for the taxpayers, it was good for the recipients because it put them on the path to self-sufficiency and a decline in child poverty.

The welfare system that was formerly called Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was retitled Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The change wasn't merely semantic; the plan was really to make welfare temporary, helping families to give up dependency on government.

Before 1996, there was nothing temporary about welfare. It was a permanent subsidy for a lifestyle that subsidized illegitimacy and avoidance of responsibility for individual behavior. Contrary to claims of those who opposed the new system, the dramatic success of the Republican welfare reform was due not to giving more flexibility to state governments, but was due to putting tough restrictions on spending the money by the states.

Obama's goal, as he has said, is to "fundamentally transform the United States" and to "spread the wealth" to produce more dependency on government. As he probably learned at the Socialist Workers conference he attended while at Columbia, and then as a student of Chicago radical Saul Alinsky, the best way to do that is to load more people onto the welfare rolls.

In gutting the Republican welfare reform, Obama ignored the fact that the work requirement written into the TANF law is "mandatory." He just went ahead and issued a waiver anyway, claiming it is OK under Section 1115 of the Social Security Act.

However, the TANF law states that waivers cannot be issued unless they are specifically listed in Section 1115. Welfare's "work" requirement" is not listed.

Robert Rector of the Heritage Foundation, who worked on writing the 1996 welfare reform, says the "mandatory work requirements" which are contained in Section 407 were deliberately not listed in Section 1115 and therefore cannot legally be waived. He reminds us that before 1996, Democrats had evaded work requirements by allowing such prevarications as hula dancing, attending Weight Watchers, and bed rest to qualify as "work."

Under the Republican welfare reform, every state must make 40 percent of welfare recipients work at least 30 hours a week, or look for work, or take on-the-job-training, vocational schooling or some job-readiness training.

Several Governors in 2005 asked Congress to give them more power to issue welfare waivers, but Congress declined to do so. So Obama, speaking through HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, simply took the unlawful action of issuing general waivers anyway.

It's a failure of leadership that Republicans are not loudly denouncing Obama's costly illegal action. They should also be demanding that Congress extend the work requirement to many other welfare-type handouts such as food stamps, public housing, and cell phones.

We now have 45 million, one in seven Americans, receiving food stamps. This high number is concealed from the taxpayers by giving recipients electronic debit cards so that others going through the line at the cash register can't detect who is being fed by the taxpayers.

Obama's illegal waivers of the work requirement for welfare payments are yet another egregiously unlawful action since the Attorneys General of nine states issued their joint statement detailing 21 illegal or unconstitutional actions of Obama.

Another is his giving amnesty to a million young illegal aliens, thereby sticking his finger in the eye of Congress, which has repeatedly refused to pass the DREAM Act.

Some Senators, led by Jeff Sessions (R-AL), and joined by Chris Crane, president of the National Immigration and Customs Enforcement Council, and George McCubbin, president of the National Border Patrol Council, are speaking publicly against the President's actions. Loose as the criteria are for the illegals to be allowed to stay in the U.S., they can escape all federal charges simply by claiming they meet the DREAM ACT's rules, whether it's true or not.

Crane says that Obama makes "untrue" statements about the border. It is not "more secure than ever"; on the contrary, it is a place of "violence, chaos and lawlessness."

When Obama didn't realize the mike was still live, he told the Russian President that after his reelection in November, he will "have more flexibility." If we care about America's future, on November 6 we must bring a stop to the "flexibility" of Obama's unlawful actions.