from Phyllis Schlafly

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WELFARE REFORM SHOULD COST LESS, NOT MORE

Rep. Jan Meyers (R-Kan) has come up with the best idea for real welfare reform that anybody has had since welfare became an entitlement in the 1960s. Unlike most "reforms", it will cost the taxpayers less, not more.

Her bill is based on an understanding of human nature as well as of the slippery slope of bureaucratic spending programs. It's so straightforward and full of common sense that it makes us wonder, "why didn't somebody think of this before now?"

Rep. Meyers's bill does three things: (1) it freezes AFDC at current levels and returns funds to the states in the form of block grants, (2) it provides that no AFDC benefits can be given at all unless paternity is established, and (3) it provides that no AFDC benefits can be given unless both the mother and father are at least 18 years of age.

Freezing the ceiling is the only way to stop the out-of-control spiral of spending that began in the 1960s. Letting the states handle AFDC through block grants will allow them flexibility to adopt innovative welfare solutions appropriate to local conditions.

Prohibiting AFDC benefits until paternity is established will make it clear, Rep. Meyers believes, that the responsibility of having a child rests with the father and mother, not with the taxpayers. The father can no longer walk away from his responsibilities and say to the mother, "You don't need me; you have welfare."

The third requirement is the most innovative part of Rep. Meyers's bill, and it shows a good understanding of the human element. Rep.

Meyers obviously understands teenagers and incentives and the role both play in our mushrooming welfare costs.

For the last couple of decades, welfare "reformers" have suggested various "incentives" to get recipients off of welfare, into a job, into training, or, in regard to teenagers, to stay in school. None of these incentives has worked very well, and the bottom line is, they always cost more money.

There are, indeed, incentives in the welfare system that do work, but they are the wrong kind of incentives.

In 1990, 68 percent of all teenage births were to unwed mothers under the age of 19. The record shows that more than half of them immediately go on AFDC and then stay on welfare until they are over 30 years old.

The public is led to believe that these girls just "find themselves pregnant" because they haven't had explicit sex education. However, most surveys show that the girls knew plenty about sex and contraceptives; they wanted to have the babies -- for various reasons such as wanting someone to love, or for self-esteem, or to acquiesce in boyfriend or peer pressure.

So, along comes Big Brother Federal Government and offers her an irresistible deal to pay her as much as $500 a month of AFDC cash plus $300 in food stamps, pay all her medical bills, and find her a new place to live. She doesn't have to work, but if she wants more schooling or job training, the government will pay for it and even pay for a baby sitter while she attends.

What does this teenage girl have to do to receive these goodies paid for by the U.S. taxpayers? She just has to have two illegitimate

babies, that's all.

Teenagers know in advance that they can be ''sexually active" and Big Brother government will pay the costs of whatever happens. As Rep. Meyers says, "Is it any wonder we have more juvenile delinquency, violent gangs, drug abuse, high-school dropouts, and teenage out-of wedlock pregnancies?"

Wake up, Americans. The bureaucrats haven't used your tax dollars to do good, but to do bad. It is bad enough that they wasted billions of our hard-earned money on a program that has failed miserably for 20 years, but it's downright criminal that they provided this wrong-headed incentive leading vulnerable teenage girls down a primrose path that produced millions of babies who are growing up without a father.

Rep. Meyer's proposal to deny AFDC payments to children under 18 means that the teenagers will know in advance that they won't be rewarded for their irresponsible behavior with separate spending money, and that they will still be dependent on their own parents. The parents of teenagers will be put on notice that they are responsible for the behavior and whereabouts of their teenage children.

Of course, this plan won't stop all out-of-wedlock births, but it will remove the wrong incentives that encourage teenagers to make bad choices that lock them into welfare dependency. More AFDC payments are not the solution; they are the problem.

Rep. Meyers's Welfare and Teenage Pregnancy Reduction Act is strong medicine for a very sick patient, the welfare system, but it's essential. It would be a great boon to the taxpayers to freeze spending increases, but it would be even greater for our society to freeze the increase in fatherless children.