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Senate

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EVERYONE ACT

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I want to say how gratified I am to hear Senator Grassley. I was very much encouraged to hear the comments of Senator Hatch.

As I see, we have been joined on the floor by Senator Snowe of Maine, the author of this amendment, and by Senator Dodd, who spoke just a few minutes ago.

I want to express to them my heartfelt thanks for their leadership in bringing this issue before us, and for working to build consensus around this amendment.

I strongly support this. In explaining that support, I go a long way back in time, back to 1936. In 1936, we did not have a welfare program at the Federal level in this country. In 1936, we adopted something after the encouragement of FDR that largely provided cash assistance to widows with children. Over the years, from 1936 through World War II and into the 1980s and 1990s, welfare changed.

By 1996, when welfare reform was adopted, widows and children were eligible for cash assistance on AFDC, Aid to Families with Dependent Children. A lot of the people receiving AFDC had children.

For the most part, they were not widows. For the most part, they had never been married.

Despite the best of intentions, what we created after 1936 was a program that encouraged many women to have children, oftentimes at a young age; encouraged men to impregnate them; and encouraged the men to walk away from the children they helped to create as if they had nothing to do with it.

That is not to say welfare as we knew it did not do a lot of good. It did. But it also caught a lot of people in quicksand from which they found it difficult to escape.

Members may recall the debate back in the 1990s. Bill Clinton, when he ran for President, said we need to change welfare as we know it. One of the reasons is, in the early 1990s, a lot of people were better off on welfare than they were working.

For the folks who went to work, who got off of welfare, here is what they gained: They gained the right to pay taxes, State income taxes, Federal income taxes, Social Security taxes.

Here is what they lost: They may lose their health care, their Medicaid health care; they may lose food stamp eligibility; they may lose assisted housing; they have to figure out how to pay for transportation to get to a job; and they will have to figure out how to pay for childcare.

That all changed effectively in 1996. A lot of Governors were involved, including some who serve here today: Governors VOINOVICH, ALLEN, myself, and EVAN BAYH of Indiana worked with a whole lot of other Governors, including John Engler of Michigan, to provide unanimity on the part of the States and the National Governors Association, who said we have to change this system. People ought to be better off when they go to work than when they are on welfare.

When we created the block grant approach, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, we said States have some flexibility in using that money that is allocated to them. They can use it for cash assistance, they can use it for childcare, they can use it for transportation assistance, they can use it for medical assistance, as well. Interestingly enough, as the welfare rolls dropped—and they are down by half—the amount of money spent out of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Family fund is now less than half of that which is spent. We spend a lot more money collectively on childcare, transportation assistance, and medical assistance. Not everyone who is off welfare is better off, but a whole lot of people are.

Fast forward today to 2004, 8 years after the adoption of the welfare reform. We heard Senator Dodd go through the numbers and explain why we need to provide this additional money. Let me reiterate a couple of points. Almost half the States have a

waiting list today for families who are eligible under the criteria of those States. They are eligible for childcare assistance. But the States cannot provide it.

California has over a quarter of a million people on the waiting list. In Virginia, there are 7,000. Again, they are eligible under the State's definition, the State's requirement for childcare, but the States cannot make good on it.

Last year, the States had a collective shortfall in their budgets of about \$80 billion. It is not a whole lot better this year. It will not be a whole lot better next year.

Along the way, the States have been changing their criteria for eligibility. A couple of examples include Ohio, Nebraska, and Kentucky. Now if you make more than \$23,000 and you have a family of three people, you are not eligible for childcare anymore. If you make more than \$19,100 in Indiana, you are not eligible for childcare assistance if you have a family of three. In Nebraska, if you make more than \$18,800 and you are a family of three, you are no longer eligible for childcare.

From my own experience as Governor of my State, there are four things needed in order to help people move off of welfare, and to stay off of welfare. One is a job. Second is a way to get to the job. Third is help with health care, children's care and their own. Last is help with childcare. If you do not have those four things—a job, a way to get to the job, help with health care, and childcare—people will not make a transition to work and remain working.

My friends, there are still some provisions in this bill over which we will probably have differences. This is one over which there should be no difference. This is a point on

which Democrats and Republicans ought to agree. I am encouraged. We have a great opportunity for consensus on this bill. A big part of reaching a consensus enables us to pass this legislation, and to agree on this amendment. If we do, my hope is we can work out some of the more difficult amendments and get to a position where we can vote on final passage today.

Remember the old saying: If it ain't broke, don't fix it. On welfare reform, a lot of skeptics in 1996 said this will not work; we will throw people to the lions, and we will make things worse. For the most part, those fears have been unfounded. For the most part, people are better off. In million of homes today, someone is waking up and going to work. Their children have seen them go to work. If we provide good childcare for their children, we reverse the likelihood their children will end up in a welfare situation.

CHRIS DODD knows this better than I do. For a child who has good reading skills, the parents have read to them. They had quality prekindergarten training. When they go into first grade they have a 15,000-word surplus compared to those kids who have not had those things. Those kids will walk into the first grade with a 15,000-word or more word deficit.

We learn, as human beings, about half of what we will learn by the time we are 6. To the extent that we have kids who are in the home of somebody who is trying to hold things together, working minimum-wage jobs, they are not getting the kind of nurturing, whether at home or through a quality pre-K program, we raise the likelihood they themselves will end up entering school behind, falling further behind, and we raise the prospect, the

likelihood they, too, will end up in a life of dependency.

It does not have to happen. I am very much encouraged if we pass this legislation today a lot of childcare providers will have the money they need to provide quality care. A lot of families ending up on the waiting lists will find the waiting lists reduced, and a lot of children who do not have a successful time of it when they get to kindergarten and first grade will have a better time of it.

Mr. DODD. I thank my Senator for his statement in support. As a former Governor, of course, he understands these issues from a State perspective, as well as cutbacks.

I am particularly grateful for the mention of the gap that exists between the poorest children in this country and those who come from the more affluent families. The slight correction I make—even his number is startling—but the average middle class child is exposed to about 500,000 words by kindergarten; an economically disadvantaged child is exposed to half as many, at best.

To put it in perspective. In a childcare setting where children, in the absence of parents who are working, can actually be in a place where they can learn, you may not close that gap entirely, but the gap of more than 100,000 words between those two children ought to startle every single American.

I thank my colleague for raising that issue.

Mr. CARPER. Whether the deficit is 100,000 or 15,000 words, it is too much.

The good news is this: We can do something about it. We can do something

about it today. We can do something about it in 25 minutes when we vote on the Snowe-Dodd amendment. That is what we need to do.