

# A Modern WPA: A Proposal to Empower Our People and Rebuild Our Country

Senator David L. Boren†

The current welfare system defies common sense and good judgment. It manages to cheat both the taxpayers and those it is supposed to help. Taxpayers resent supporting an overly expensive, inefficient system with very few tangible benefits in return for what they pay. At the same time, poor Americans, who rely on the welfare system for support and hope, are becoming increasingly alienated from mainstream American society. Denied the self-esteem that comes from performing useful work, welfare beneficiaries are left with no hope and little motivation to achieve. Many commentators believe that idleness encouraged by the current welfare system contributes to increased crime rates, family disintegration, higher school dropout rates, and many other serious social problems.<sup>1</sup>

The call for welfare reform comes from all points on the political spectrum. Although there is an emerging consensus that the current welfare system fosters dependency, rather than self-sufficiency,<sup>2</sup> there remains disagreement about the proper direction for reform. Very few Americans advocate eliminating welfare entirely; indeed, a recent poll revealed that 93% of Americans oppose such a radical proposal.<sup>3</sup> Some reformers have advocated changing the benefit structure so that it operates in a "carrot-and-stick" fashion. Higher benefits would reward positive changes in recipient behavior, and benefits would decline or disappear for those who continue to exhibit socially undesirable behavior patterns.<sup>4</sup> Other reformers, believing that the economic and social environment is the primary cause of dependency, stress increased job training and education for welfare recipients.<sup>5</sup> This philosophy underlies the

---

† United States Senator from Oklahoma; B.A., Yale University, 1963; M.A., Oxford University, 1965; J.D., University of Oklahoma College of Law, 1968.

1. See, e.g., CHARLES MURRAY, *LOSING GROUND* 154-77 (1984); MICKEY KAUS, *THE END OF EQUALITY* 103-20 (1992).

2. *The Carrots and Stick of Welfare Reform*, *THE ECONOMIST*, Mar. 13, 1993, at 31.

3. David Whitman, *Welfare: An Agenda for Change*, *U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP.*, Oct. 5, 1992, at 38 (citing May 1992 poll by Yankelovich Clancy Shulman for *Time* and CNN).

4. Many state governments have adopted this philosophy, linking benefit levels to changes in behaviors affecting work, education, marriage, childbearing, and health care. Paul Taylor, *Welfare Reformers Seek to Modify Budgets and Behavior*, *WASH. POST*, Dec. 16, 1991, at A1; Paul Taylor, *Debating the Lesson of Learnfare: Does Cutting Welfare Reduce Truancy*, *WASH. POST*, Feb. 19, 1992, at A17 (describing the effectiveness of the Wisconsin Learnfare program linking benefit levels to teenagers' school attendance).

5. See DANIEL P. MOYNIHAN, *FAMILY AND NATION* 165-66 (1987) (discussing the research of the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation).

## A Modern WPA

welfare reform legislation passed in 1988, which included as one of its central provisions the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) Training Program.<sup>6</sup>

Gradually, a bipartisan awareness has emerged that both of the above philosophies must be integrated in any successful reform effort. Many of us in Congress have realized that we must craft a system that requires all Americans to take personal responsibility for their decisions and encourages them to take actions to improve their lives. At the same time, we must acknowledge the reality of the modern inner-city and of many economically depressed rural areas.<sup>7</sup> These areas are characterized by a lack of real opportunity for employment or meaningful advancement toward the American dream. Citizens who want to escape the tragic cycle of dependency and to care for themselves and their families without government help simply cannot find a way to do so.

The current welfare crisis presents a challenge similar to the one that the country faced nearly sixty years ago. During the Great Depression, we addressed the problems of unemployment, poverty, and hopelessness with two straight-forward, action-oriented government programs: the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps. Throughout 1992, I led the effort in Congress to establish modern versions of these New Deal era programs, in the hope of transforming the current welfare system.<sup>8</sup> I have continued my efforts this year, introducing each program as a separate bill to provide a legislative blueprint for the reforms sought by President Clinton.<sup>9</sup> Although he has presented only the general outline of his welfare reform program, President Clinton has proposed that welfare recipients be limited to two years of cash assistance, education, training, and child care; thereafter, cash assistance would cease, and people would be required to work in community service projects or find other employment.<sup>10</sup>

---

6. See *infra* text accompanying notes 42-45 (discussing the JOBS program).

7. See Sandra Danziger & Sheldon Danziger, *Child Poverty and Public Policy: Toward a Comprehensive Anti-Poverty Agenda*, 122 DAEDALUS (1993) (providing an assessment of the lack of opportunities available to disadvantaged children).

8. I introduced the Community Works Progress Act of 1992, S. 2373, 102d Cong., 2d Sess., with the strong support of Senators Paul Simon, Democrat of Illinois, and Harris Wofford, Democrat of Pennsylvania. 138 CONG. REC. S3961-67 (daily ed. Mar. 19, 1992). In addition, several other Senators co-sponsored an amendment to the Department of Defense authorization bill to establish a demonstration program for the new Civilian Community Corps. 138 CONG. REC. S13852-57 (daily ed. Sept. 8, 1992). The parallel bill in the House of Representatives, H.R. 4591, was introduced by my colleague from Oklahoma, Glenn English, and co-sponsored by 15 other members of Congress. 138 CONG. REC. H1993 (daily ed. Mar. 26, 1992).

9. Community Works Progress Act of 1993, S.239, 103d Cong., 1st Sess., was introduced on January 27 and referred to the Committee on Labor and Human Resources. 139 CONG. REC. S810-13 (daily ed. Jan. 29, 1993). The Civilian Community Corps Act of 1993, S.233, 103d Cong., 1st Sess., was introduced on the same day and referred to the Committee on Armed Services. 139 CONG. REC. S808 (daily ed. Jan. 27, 1993).

10. See BILL CLINTON & AL GORE, PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST: HOW WE CAN ALL CHANGE AMERICA 165 (1992); see also Bill Clinton, Address to the National Governors' Association (Feb. 2, 1993).

Given the increased support in the legislative and executive branches for welfare reform emphasizing self-sufficiency, the new WPA and CCC warrant serious attention and consideration. This Article briefly traces the history of the Great Depression jobs programs—programs that continue to resonate with all Americans, whether they are members of the generation that participated in that part of history or are members of the generation that has benefitted from the fruits of that labor. The Article next discusses the problems facing our inner cities and our welfare system that have prompted the cry for substantial and sweeping change. Finally, the Article outlines my proposals that have already garnered widespread support in the 103d Congress.

### I. THE WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION AND THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Confronted with the immense human misery caused by the Great Depression, Franklin Delano Roosevelt decided that the government's role was to provide a way for Americans to work their way out of the crisis. He rejected proposals to establish programs giving people cash assistance only. "[C]ontinued dependence upon relief induces a spiritual and moral disintegration fundamentally destructive to the national fibre. To dole out relief in this way is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit," he told Congress. "We must preserve not only the bodies of the unemployed from destitution but also their self-respect, their self-reliance and courage and determination."<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, President Roosevelt formed the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to employ out-of-work Americans and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to give young people the chance to work by developing the country's natural resources. The WPA was administered by Harry Hopkins, who shared Roosevelt's distaste for handouts. He clearly expressed his philosophy:

On the question of a work program as against direct relief, it is my conviction, and one of the strongest convictions I hold, that the Federal Government should never return to a direct relief program. It is degrading to the individual; it destroys morale and self-respect; it results in no increase in the wealth of the community; it tends to destroy the ability of the individual to perform useful work in the future and it tends to establish a permanent body of dependents. We should do away with direct relief for the unemployed in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

---

11. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Annual Message to Congress (Jan. 4, 1935), in 4 THE PUBLIC PAPERS AND ADDRESSES OF FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT 19-20 (Samuel I. Rosenman ed., 1938).

12. JOSEPHINE C. BROWN, PUBLIC RELIEF 1929-1939 341 (1971) (quoting Harry Hopkins).

## A Modern WPA

The accomplishments of the WPA are impressive. The program employed 8.5 million people over the course of eight years,<sup>13</sup> with a peak involvement in 1938-1939 of 2.9 million workers.<sup>14</sup> These numbers mean that each year the WPA employed an average of 5% of all workers in the American economy, and by the time the WPA was phased out, the projects had employed 20% of the work force.<sup>15</sup> These citizens participated in a vast array of activities. They built or renovated 651,000 miles of highways and roads, 78,000 bridges, 125,000 buildings, 8000 parks, and 12,800 playgrounds.<sup>16</sup> Participants taught over 200,000 adults to read,<sup>17</sup> served over 600 million school lunches, produced more than 300 million garments for poor Americans, and organized approximately 1500 day care centers that served 36,000 children.<sup>18</sup>

Certainly, these statistics are impressive, but they do not reveal the human dimension of the bricks and mortar assembled by these hardworking Americans. In my own state of Oklahoma, WPA participants restored the home of the great Cherokee leader Sequoyah and helped excavate the Spiro Mounds, remains of a pre-Columbian Native American community. These projects meant more to the workers than just a job; they provided an opportunity for these men and women to contribute to their society and to their cultural heritage at a time when many felt unneeded and alienated from the rest of America. I will never forget talking with an elderly gentleman in the Pecan Bowl in Okemah, Oklahoma, the home of Woody Guthrie. He came up to me and said, "Senator, you see that stadium wall over there? I built that myself. It was part of the WPA. You know, it's not out of line. There's not a crack in it to this good day." As I listened I thought to myself, "That man feels part of the community because of the job he was given. I bet he has never even dropped a candy wrapper in that stadium."<sup>19</sup>

---

13. Keith L. Greenberg, *Work Projects Administration 1935-1943* 13 (Dec. 11, 1990) (unpublished manuscript, on file with author).

14. Donald S. Howard, *WPA: "A Giant Rescue Operation,"* WASH. POST, Jan. 7, 1975, at A14.

15. *Id.*

16. *WPA: It Wasn't All Leaf-Raking,* NEWSWEEK, Jan. 20, 1975, at 57.

17. Greenberg, *supra* note 13, at 14.

18. Howard, *supra* note 14.

19. See 139 CONG. REC. S805-6 (daily ed. Jan. 27, 1993). I have received many letters from around the nation recounting very personal stories and successes of people who participated in the WPA. An especially poignant letter was written by a woman whose father died suddenly, in the middle of the Great Depression. She writes: "[J]ust as we were at rock-bottom, [my mother] was introduced to the WPA and was employed as a kindergarten teacher. . . . Her talents made a lasting contribution, and we were saved from the street. I repeat this personal history to make an important point. Far from 'make work' the WPA did wonderful things for our community. Many kindergartens and nursery schools like the one where my mother taught would never have existed except for the WPA. . . . Women who didn't have as much education or training were assigned to a 'sewing project' which repaired and sewed clothing for families on 'relief'. . . . Writers and artists were saved from starvation to produce books and art that are valued today, infrastructure was repaired, children cared for. The list could go on and on." Letter from Leila C. Broughton to Senators David L. Boren and Paul Simon (May 22, 1992) (on file with author).

The CCC provided youths with similar opportunities to learn skills and make lasting contributions to their community and the nation. The CCC took three million young people and put them to work on the land and with our natural resources in every state and territory.<sup>20</sup> Americans aged 18 to 25 worked in the nation's forests, parks, wilderness, and national monuments. In the space of nine years, the CCC developed more than 800 state and national parks, 4000 historical structures, 60,000 buildings, 38,500 bridges, and 97,000 miles of roads.<sup>21</sup> Participants planted more than four billion trees, stocked two billion fish, stopped erosion on more than 200 million acres of land, and spent four million days fighting fires and floods.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps most important to me as an Oklahoman, the corpsmembers helped restore the "dust bowl" to its more productive role as the nation's bread basket. It is estimated that it would have taken more than 50 years to accomplish all this in the absence of the CCC program.<sup>23</sup>

The CCC was characterized in part by its emphasis on military techniques. Military discipline was a way of life in the CCC camps that were located in barracks or tents. Corpsmembers wore uniforms and boots that were left over from World War I, and they were led by reserve military officers.<sup>24</sup> Although all Americans are familiar with the role of young Americans in the CCC, many of us are less aware that over 225,000 veterans of World War I also served as corpsmembers.<sup>25</sup>

I have received hundreds of letters from Americans who participated in the Depression-era CCC vividly describing the sense of pride and community that the CCC cultivated and developed within them. This pride has survived the passage of decades and is revived every time a corpsmember enjoys a day in a national park or walks past a building or a park that he or she helped build. By being given the opportunity to go back to work, young people avoided the disillusionment and depression suffered by many unemployed persons and instead learned skills which they retained throughout their lives. One man from Watts, Oklahoma, writes:

I spent a couple of years in the CCC during the thirties and learned a good trade along with doing some meaningful work. I was a heavy equipment operator and we were engaged in Soil Conservation Service work. I made a career out of heavy construction and made a good living also.<sup>26</sup>

---

20. Marion Wilbur, *America's Greatest Conservation Army*, CAL. HISTORIAN, May 1990, at 8.

21. *Id.*

22. *Id.*

23. *Id.*

24. Neal R. Peirce, *For the Young, Service with a Smile*, NAT'L J., July 4, 1992, at 1590.

25. JOHN A. SALMOND, *THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS, 1933-42* 35-37 (1967).

26. Letter from Jack H. Bagby to Senator David L. Boren (Jan. 9, 1992) (on file with author).

## A Modern WPA

Is it any wonder, then, that the building on the site of the old WPA building in Washington, D.C. contains the following inscription: "Work is America's answer to the need of idle millions. Work, not charity. Peaceful work, not regimentation to build machines of war. Useful public work to benefit us all."

## II. THE CURRENT CRISIS OF DEPENDENCY AND POVERTY

Although the economic causes of poverty in the 1930s are not identical to the contributing factors we confront today, the detrimental effects of unemployment and dependency on Americans remain unchanged. Admittedly, the impressive legacy of the WPA and the CCC was not costless. During the Depression era, this country made an eight-year investment of \$90 billion (in today's dollars) to build infrastructure, to revitalize our natural resources, and to provide opportunity, hope, dignity, and self-sufficiency for millions of unemployed Americans. Although this was a significant commitment of government resources, it pales in comparison to the tax dollars America spends to administer its welfare system today. In the eight years between 1983 and 1990, the United States government spent over \$900 billion to provide all types of income-tested benefits to economically disadvantaged Americans.<sup>27</sup> What does the country really have to show for this immense expenditure of taxpayer funds? How have the lives of the recipients been improved?

This country's decision to rely heavily on the federal dole, rather than job creation, to deal with the problems of poverty and unemployment has had far-reaching consequences. Many of the rioters in Los Angeles last summer acted out their feelings of hopelessness—feelings shared by many of the more than 15 million other inner-city poor.<sup>28</sup> Without a sense of purpose, without a feeling that they have stake in the nation, many desperate individuals turn to violence, drugs, and gangs. Our expensive welfare system has managed to produce little more than subsistence-level payments to an increasingly alienated segment of American society. By simply handing people checks, the system has robbed them of any incentive to achieve and of any motivation to succeed. Little is worse for a person's self-esteem than having no reason to get out of bed in the morning and no useful work to perform. Moreover, the problem is exacerbated when one lives in a culture where almost everyone else faces the same desperate situation.

The situation is only growing worse as more and more Americans are forced onto the welfare rolls. The number of families on AFDC reached an

---

27. VEE BURKE, CASH AND NONCASH BENEFITS FOR PERSONS WITH LIMITED INCOME: ELIGIBILITY RULES, RECIPIENT AND EXPENDITURE DATA, FY 1988-90 CRS-6, tbl. 3 (CRS Report for Congress No. 91-741 EPW, Sept. 30, 1991).

28. Christopher Farrell, *The Economic Crisis of Urban America*, BUS. WK., May 18, 1992, at 38.

all-time high in 1991, with an average monthly enrollment of almost 4.4 million families, as compared to a monthly average of 3.9 million in 1981.<sup>29</sup> In January 1992, 13.5 million Americans were receiving AFDC payments.<sup>30</sup> Enrollment is expected to increase steadily over the next few years, reaching a total of 4.8 million families in 1997.<sup>31</sup>

These figures might be less alarming if families remained on welfare only a short time, using the assistance to provide themselves time to regroup and reenter society as productive workers. While over half of those receiving welfare remain on the rolls for less than four years and do not return to the system,<sup>32</sup> at any point in time most of those enrolled in welfare are in the midst of "spells" that last at least eight years. These individuals, in fact, receive the majority of welfare resources.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, multiple welfare spells are very common; approximately one third of welfare spells are followed by at least one more period of time on welfare.<sup>34</sup>

The future of our nation's children is increasingly a future of welfare and dependency. Many families are disintegrating. Eighty percent of children in some inner-city areas are born out of wedlock;<sup>35</sup> nearly one in ten of our nation's children live in households not headed by either parent.<sup>36</sup> Attributing their findings in part to the absence of one or both parents in many American welfare families, a study of seven industrialized nations found that the United States had the highest poverty rates, and the poverty was of a deeper and longer duration than the poverty suffered in the other countries in the study.<sup>37</sup> Over 8.5 million of our nation's children—the hope of this country and our most precious national resource—received AFDC payments in 1991.<sup>38</sup>

As we become more aware of these intolerable statistics, we are compelled to search for the reasons for entrenched poverty—a condition that deadens the spirit of so many of our citizens and denies our children any real opportunity

---

29. STAFF OF HOUSE COMM. ON WAYS AND MEANS, 102D CONG., 2D SESS., OVERVIEW OF ENTITLEMENT PROGRAMS 655 (Comm. Print 1992) [hereinafter GREEN BOOK].

30. David Whitman, *War on Welfare Dependency*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Apr. 20, 1992, at 34.

31. GREEN BOOK, *supra* note 29, at 655.

32. Jason DeParle, *Why Marginal Changes Don't Rescue the Welfare System*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 1, 1992, § 4, at 3.

33. GREEN BOOK, *supra* note 29, at 685-86.

34. *Id.* at 685.

35. Richard Whitmire, *Is High Rate of Unmarried Moms an Unstoppable Trend?*, GANNETT NEWS SERVICE, Feb. 4, 1992; see also Mortimer B. Zuckerman, *The New Realism*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., May 25, 1992, at 94.

36. Jane Gross, *Collapse of Inner-City Families Creates America's New Orphans*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 29, 1992, at 1.

37. Paul Taylor, *Poverty in U.S.: Deeper, Long-Lasting; European Nations' Programs Seen Doing More to Help Citizens*, WASH. POST, Sept. 19, 1992, at A19 (discussing study of the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, West Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands conducted by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a think tank that focuses on policy issues of concern to the African American community).

38. GREEN BOOK, *supra* note 29, at 666.

## A Modern WPA

for success. Mickey Kaus, author of a recent book on America's social welfare policy, argues that although the welfare system may not have caused the economic and social poverty of the inner city, it has enabled the underclass to endure, the poverty to continue, and the country largely to ignore the human cost of the ghetto.<sup>39</sup> It has enabled the underclass to subsist—barely—keeping the inner cities “under control,” such that life outside the ghetto is seldom directly affected. The poor have little incentive to find employment as long as they can survive on federal assistance and are under no pressure from those around them to emerge from the cycle of dependency and hopelessness. As Kaus observes, “there is a culture of poverty out there that has taken on a life of its own.”<sup>40</sup>

We did not heed the words of FDR when he warned us to adopt employment and poverty programs designed primarily to preserve the self-respect and the self-reliance of the poor and unemployed. His decree that “[t]he Federal Government must and shall quit this business of relief”<sup>41</sup> was replaced by welfare policies that have led to a debilitating deterioration of the spirit of many Americans. I am convinced, however, that this situation can be reversed. We need not sit by while another generation of inner-city youths drops out of school and into the streets, joblessness, drugs, and the dependency systems of welfare and prisons. America's poor do not want to be viewed as a danger, as the enemy, but rather as a talented resource. The challenge for the administration, the Congress, and our country is to transform the welfare system so that it empowers these people to improve their lives and revitalize their communities.

### III. A MODERN COMMUNITY WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION AND CIVILIAN COMMUNITY CORPS

Our country cannot tolerate a welfare system that teaches another generation of poor children the lessons of dependency, rather than showing them what behavior leads to self-esteem and personal responsibility. A society that must care for its children and that must repair and expand its roads and schools cannot afford to pay able men and women to sit idle. Furthermore, a nation making the transition from a defense economy to a peace-time economy cannot afford to waste the skills and knowledge of the talented service personnel who are no longer needed in the military. The proposals to create a modern

---

39. See generally KAUS, *supra* note 1.

40. Mickey Kaus, *The Work Ethic State*, NEW REPUBLIC, July 7, 1986, at 22.

41. *Community Works Progress Act, 1992: Hearings on S. 2373 Before the Subcomm. on Employment and Productivity of the Senate Comm. on Labor and Human Resources*, 102d Cong., 2d Sess. 39 (May 21, 1992) (testimony of Mickey Kaus) (quoting President Franklin D. Roosevelt).

Community Works Progress Administration and a Civilian Community Corps, address all of these challenges and turn them into opportunities to rebuild the country and revitalize our human resources. Although I have introduced these programs in separate bills, any comprehensive solution to the long-term consequences of dependency and poverty must provide opportunities to people of all ages.

#### A. *The Community Works Progress Administration*

Federal assistance programs are presently not equipped to break the cycle of dependency and poverty and to provide productive workers to rebuild our country's decaying infrastructure. The Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program is designed to ensure that needy families with children obtain services that will help them to avoid long-term dependence on federal aid. This program does not provide a comprehensive solution; however, under JOBS, states must provide benefits such as education, job skills training, job development, and other supportive services. States must also offer two of the following activities: group and individual job search, on-the-job training, work supplementation programs, and community work experience programs (CWEP) or other work experience programs.<sup>42</sup> The JOBS program is a good beginning and provides necessary educational and job-related services that are particularly helpful for persons who are not long-term welfare recipients or who have been employed in the past. But it is simply not enough.

The problem with the JOBS program is that it often trains people for jobs that do not exist. Rarely does it actually provide jobs for welfare recipients. States have the option of establishing CWEPs that are designed to provide work for recipients on community projects in fields such as health, social services, environmental protection, recreation, public safety, and child care.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, CWEPs are not widespread; only 30 states provide this option,<sup>44</sup> and only 2.6% of JOBS participants are enrolled in community work projects.<sup>45</sup> Most JOBS participants are given only job training—an insufficient response when few jobs are available in our sluggish economy. Teaching people to write resumes will be of little help if they have no actual work experience to show potential employers.

The new Community WPA creates jobs for welfare recipients and the unemployed to help them feel part of the community. It puts people back to work as productive members of society. In short, it puts the actual work in workfare requirements. Through a grant program administered by the Secretary

---

42. GREEN BOOK, *supra* note 29, at 611.

43. *Id.* at 612.

44. *Id.* at 616-19.

45. *Id.* at 623.

## A Modern WPA

of Labor, states that have submitted competitive proposals to establish community works progress programs will receive federal funds. Local and state agencies, as well as private nonprofit organizations, can apply to their state to participate in the program. All able-bodied welfare recipients who have been participating in the JOBS program for two years and have not found employment will be required to take a job with the new Community WPA, and all other welfare recipients are eligible to participate.

The Community WPA does more than reform the welfare system, however. The program is constructed so that it reaches not only women with dependent children, but also as many unemployed men as possible. Requiring participation from AFDC recipients alone cannot meet this objective because 92% of AFDC families have no father living in the home.<sup>46</sup> A number of men can be required to participate through the AFDC-Unemployed Parent (AFDC-UP) program, which was established in 1990 to offer assistance to children of two-parent families who are needy because of the unemployment of one of their parents.<sup>47</sup> However, many other men not counted in official unemployment figures are falling through the cracks in the current system because they have never held a job entitling them to unemployment compensation or have never received AFDC-UP benefits. Some of these men can be reached by allowing unemployed persons to participate in the Community WPA if they have been unemployed for at least 35 work days before they are placed in a project. Finally, another group of men can be involved in the Community WPA by requiring the participation of unemployed noncustodial parents who are more than two months in arrears in court-ordered child support payments.<sup>48</sup>

This final provision also promises to help bring some of our nation's children out of poverty. According to a report by the Commission on Interstate Child Support, approximately 10 million mothers were entitled to child support payments in 1989, but only 5.7 million had support orders or agreements, and only half of them actually received their payments.<sup>49</sup> As much as \$25 billion in child support may be uncollected now, much of which would go toward helping to lift single mothers and their children out of poverty. By employing noncustodial parents who owe child support, the Community WPA can provide a way for them to meet their financial obligations to their children.

---

46. *Id.* at 669.

47. *Id.* at 603.

48. This provision will also improve the lives of the children who rely on such support. Of the \$16.3 billion in annual child support ordered by courts in 1989, only \$11.2 billion was paid. Only 11% of those receiving support were AFDC mothers. Thomas Sancton, *How to Get America Off the Dole*, TIME, May 25, 1992, at 47.

49. Edward Walsh, *Clinton Stance Bolsters Growing Crusade to Enforce Child Support*, WASH. POST, Jan. 3, 1993, at A3.

Participants in the Community WPA will work the number of hours equal to their benefit amount divided by a rate of pay determined by the Secretary of Labor, after consultation with the business community, labor organizations, state and local governments, participants, and other interested groups. If they volunteer to work additional hours on a project, workers must receive at least the appropriate rate of pay for that work. When the Secretary decides on the appropriate rate of pay, he should consider that while pay must be sufficient, it must not be so attractive as to provide a disincentive for participants to search for private employment once they acquire necessary job skills. The Community WPA is only one step in a process of eliminating dependency and teaching responsibility; it is not intended to provide permanent employment. To prevent the entrenchment of both personnel and bureaucracy, projects will be designed so they can be completed within two years.

In addition, participants who receive either AFDC benefits or unemployment compensation will receive a monthly bonus determined by the Secretary, and that bonus will not be considered in determining their eligibility for other means-tested programs. The bonus demonstrates that the Community WPA is not a punitive proposal; rather, it is designed to increase the opportunities for disadvantaged people while fostering the value of work in our society. The proposal encourages projects to pay participants their monthly benefit and bonus with one check to strengthen the link between work and earnings.

Community WPA projects consist of a range of activities that serve significant public purposes in fields such as health, social services, environmental protection, education, urban and rural development and redevelopment, recreation, public safety, and child care. Finding projects that will result in significant contributions to our country will pose no problem for the Community WPA. The Conference of Mayors has identified over 7200 projects in 506 cities that are "ready to go" immediately.<sup>50</sup> Coordinating participants with projects is also readily achievable. For instance, Oregon has developed a program that pools together funding for AFDC, food stamps, and unemployment compensation in six counties to provide jobs in the public and private sector to over 10,000 adults.<sup>51</sup>

The commitment of the country to this kind of jobs program will not be limited to the governmental sector; the entire community will pull together to put people to work on projects vital to the well-being of our society. Such active public and private community involvement is already visible in certain

---

50. See generally UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS, "READY TO GO": A SURVEY OF USA PUBLIC WORKS PROJECTS TO FIGHT THE RECESSION NOW (Feb. 1992); Louis Uchitelle, *Can He Get This Thing to Run?*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 8, 1992, § 3, at 1.

51. Whitman, *supra* note 3.

## A Modern WPA

areas.<sup>52</sup> Amidst the debris in Los Angeles, private initiatives such as Rebuild Los Angeles offer hope that residents will be given a stake in their communities, providing them an incentive to maintain their neighborhoods and city.<sup>53</sup> The leadership of President Carter has engendered spirit, energy, and hope throughout the country, especially through his work on the Atlanta Project.<sup>54</sup> President Carter believes that with the help of private nonprofit projects, the Community WPA “will help create opportunity in economically disadvantaged communities, while increasing their fiscal well-being and raising the quality of life through projects which provide tangible community benefits.”<sup>55</sup>

These jobs will enhance the skills of men and women through on-the-job learning as well as through more formal job enhancement activities. Working on a project will teach necessary life skills, such as the importance of coming to work on time and the way to work with others in a productive venture. The discipline of work is a radically new, and often frightening, experience for many AFDC recipients, and programs must be structured so that participants are encouraged to remain in the workforce. Job training outside the Community WPA project will be closely coordinated with existing state services and with community-based job training and education facilities. It will be tailored to meet individual needs as much as possible. To assure that each individual will have time to seek other employment or to participate in alternative job training and readiness activities, no person will be allowed to work on a project more than 32 hours a week, and all participants will be required to participate in job search activities. For the first time, in many cases, involvement in the Community WPA will give people an actual work experience to list on the resumes that they are learning to write.

In the last session of the 102d Congress, a demonstration project of the Community WPA was included in the comprehensive tax bill, H.R. 11, legislation that was intended in part to deal with the urban crisis brought to the national consciousness by the riot in Los Angeles. The Community WPA provision, which was similar to the proposal outlined above, would have established six demonstration sites—two state-wide programs and four programs in urban centers—to test whether the Community WPA can bring hope to the disillusioned and alienated citizens in our country. The tax bill allocated \$200 million to be spent over fiscal years 1993, 1994, and 1995 for the

---

52. InDex, a nonprofit corporation in Tulsa, Oklahoma, is an example of a private sector program which provides jobs to AFDC recipients. This innovative 42-week program provides extensive initial training, including preparation for the GED, basic computer skills, and individually-tailored work and education plans. See Nancy Hollingshead, *IndEx Forms Partnership with Zebco, Wal-Mart*, TULSA BUS. J., July 27-Aug. 2, 1992, at 2.

53. See Eloise Salholz et al., *A New Challenge for Ueberroth*, NEWSWEEK, May 18, 1992, at 45.

54. See *A Guide to the Atlanta Project*, ATLANTA J./ATLANTA CONST., Mar. 7, 1992, at B6 (discussing the efforts and structure of the Atlanta Project).

55. Letter from former President Jimmy Carter to Senator David Boren, Aug. 3, 1992, reprinted in CONG. REC. S14,943 (daily ed. Sept. 24, 1992).

demonstration project and for a rigorous evaluation of its success. Although the tax bill was vetoed by President Bush on November 4, 1992, the adoption of the provision by the 102d Congress, along with President Clinton's call for bold, persistent experimentation,<sup>56</sup> indicate that it will serve as the basis for far-reaching welfare reform in 1993.

### B. *The Civilian Community Corps*

In addition to sponsoring the Community WPA, I have joined with others to propose a national youth service program designed to strengthen community service among younger Americans and to offer disadvantaged youths a chance to improve their lives. The success of a residential, federally run Civilian Community Corps is suggested not only by the success of the Depression-era CCC but also by the success of the more than 75 youth service and conservation corps operating throughout the United States.<sup>57</sup> My colleague from Pennsylvania, Harris Wofford, related a revealing comment from one high school dropout now involved in a service corps in Philadelphia. This young man understands that his productive work will not only help his community, but it will help him as well. "I got tired," he says, "of people coming to do good against me, trying to help me all the time. This Corps asked me to do the helping. Now, I'm making a difference." By asking young people to participate, we gain the contributions of their labor, while instilling a sense of national pride in them.

A national CCC would allow young people to make a difference in their communities and improve their country. America must harness the energy and skills of its youth and allow them to interact as teams working to achieve a common goal. In addition, the CCC would allow military personnel, presently being mustered out of the military as we shrink the defense sector of the economy, to play a vital role in this process as mentors and teachers, imparting to these young people the values of discipline and organized work. As the late Arthur Ashe observed when he advocated a national service program in response to the L.A. riots:

---

56. See President's Inaugural Address, 29 WEEKLY COMP. PRES. DOC. 3 (Jan. 20, 1993).

57. Peirce, *supra* note 24, at 1590.

## A Modern WPA

Families rent apart by welfare dependency, job discrimination and intense feelings of alienation have produced minority teenagers with very little self-discipline and little faith that good grades and the American work ethic will pay off. A military-like environment for them with practical domestic objectives could produce startling results.

. . .

Discipline is a cornerstone of any responsible citizen's life. . . . [I]t must be learned or it doesn't take hold.<sup>58</sup>

Although the CCC may become an independent entity in time, my proposal initially puts the program in the Commission on National and Community Service (CNCS), a government entity charged with renewing the ethic of civic responsibility in the United States.<sup>59</sup> When the CCC Director begins to operate the CCC, he or she can draw on the experience of the Commission to oversee and evaluate youth service projects. The CCC will consist of numerous camps located throughout the country in urban and rural areas, each camp housing and training 200 to 300 young people from diverse economic, social, geo-graphic, and ethnic backgrounds. The camps will be situated at military bases or national guard facilities that have either been closed or have excess capacity as a result of the defense conversion. As my colleague from Virginia, Senator John Warner, has observed, "Why not fill those empty bunks and dormitory barracks with young people who need a chance to work and whose talents are needed to rebuild America?"

The CCC offers talented military people who are being forced into early retirement because of changes in the world to take up leadership roles again. The CCC will be led by a retired military officer, and other professionals, who will comprise the cadre of teachers, will be drawn in part from a pool of retired, discharged, or inactive servicepersons. Just as the corpsmembers will be a diverse group of Americans, their teachers will also come from different backgrounds and professional careers. The CCC will involve people who have been active in the Peace Corps, in VISTA, or in other similar programs, who have experience in youth training and national service programs, or who share a commitment to building a national community of dedicated citizens.

The CCC will instill a sense of community in the young corpsmembers through a service-learning curriculum where participants work in teams on specific and meaningful community projects. The teams will first receive advanced service training, taught largely by military personnel, to learn basic skills and to engage in rigorous physical training. They will then go out into the communities as members of a unified team, and work on important projects, ranging from urban renewal to environmental protection. These jobs will

---

58. Arthur Ashe, *Can a New "Army" Save Our Cities?*, WASH. POST, May 10, 1992, at C2.

59. National and Community Service Act, Pub. L. No. 101-610, 104 Stat. 3127 (1990).

require participants to employ their newly acquired skills and will help develop their understanding of civic responsibility. The projects will be selected by camp leaders from proposals submitted by both public and private organizations and agencies, representatives of local communities, and the Departments of Agriculture, Interior, and Housing and Urban Development. The nation thus benefits doubly—from the results of the work and from the effects of the experience on the young people and on their teachers.

Because corpsmembers work in teams and live together in dormitories, they will be able to establish links with their peers and with their mentors that will allow them to feel part of a greater experience. This team spirit, resulting from the corps organization and the military-style training, will teach discipline and cooperative effort. Because they will be brought together with other young people from different parts of the country and from different ethnic groups, they will learn to appreciate diversity by sharing different perspectives with each other. Only a national program that combines a team approach with a residential component offers this unique experience for our nation's youths.

Not only is a sense of national pride and community important for young people, a sense of the importance of education is also vital. Accordingly, corpsmembers will participate in educational and training programs in a variety of technical fields. Youths who have not received a high school diploma will work toward that goal as they participate in the CCC. After their service, corpsmembers will be eligible for substantial education credits—\$5000 for every year of service—or for half that amount in cash. This compensation supplements a living allowance provided to participants, which may include allowances for travel, personal expenses, transportation, equipment, clothing, recreational services and supplies, and other services. The Director may also determine that it is appropriate to provide other post-service benefits to help corpsmembers complete the transition from the CCC to work or school.

The CCC includes two programs—a year-long program and a shorter summer program. The year-long program is designed for a diverse service corps of male and female youths between seventeen and twenty-five years of age. Participants will be drawn from a variety of economic, geographic, and ethnic backgrounds, with at least half being economically disadvantaged youths. Corpsmembers can participate in no more than two year-long programs. The CCC also establishes a shorter summer program that will include disadvantaged high school students. However, the summer program will offer service opportunities to a diverse group of teens, including youths from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

The support for a CCC program in Congress was enthusiastic and crossed ideological alignments and party affiliations. The Department of Defense Authorization bill for fiscal year 1993 included an authorization of \$35 million for a federally run, residential CCC program as part of the economic conver-

## A Modern WPA

sion package. The subsequent Appropriations bill allocated \$20 million for a demonstration project of the CCC and for an evaluation of the project after it has been in place for a year. The money has been released to the CNCS, and the search for a CCC Director has begun. The program coincides with President Clinton's call for a national youth service program that would allow young people to borrow money for post-high school education and repay it either as a percentage of their paychecks or by participating in community service.<sup>60</sup>

## IV. CONCLUSION

It seems that our current system discourages individual initiative and encourages dependency. We have to reexamine the basic assumptions of our assistance programs and determine whether there are better solutions to reward people who take responsibility for their lives. We talk frequently in this country of empowerment. Nothing empowers people more than a job and the feeling of accomplishment that goes with it. The most unfortunate result of government handouts is that recipients begin to feel that they are not useful. They lose their sense of self-worth and become divorced from any feeling of community.

We must reawaken the spirit of community in this country. It is time to recycle approaches that worked well in the past—the WPA and the CCC—and modify them to meet current conditions. We have two distinct options: we can either pay people to do nothing or pay people to work. In an era of increasing global competitiveness, we cannot afford to let an able and willing work force sit idle. We must use assistance to instill in all our citizens the ethic of hard work, give them an opportunity for accomplishments to look back on with pride, and reward them for providing service to their community.

Franklin Roosevelt observed fifty years ago that “[w]ork and [s]ecurity . . . are more than words. . . . [t]hey are the spiritual values, the true goal toward which our efforts of reconstruction should lead.”<sup>61</sup> FDR's observation should guide us today as we construct welfare reform proposals and programs to revitalize the nation's poor areas and give hope to the country's youth. Instead of exacerbating the growing division between taxpayers and welfare recipients, it is time to adopt sweeping change. It is time to make all Americans part of the same team. Too often we talk about problems, instead of doing something about them. We need action—immediate and sustained action. America worked its way out of a crisis in the 1930s. With a new administration and a bipartisan resolve in the new Congress, America can do it again.

---

60. See Bill Clinton, Address at the University of Notre Dame (Sept. 11, 1992).

61. THE WIT AND WISDOM OF FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT 38 (Maxwell Meyerson ed., 1950).

