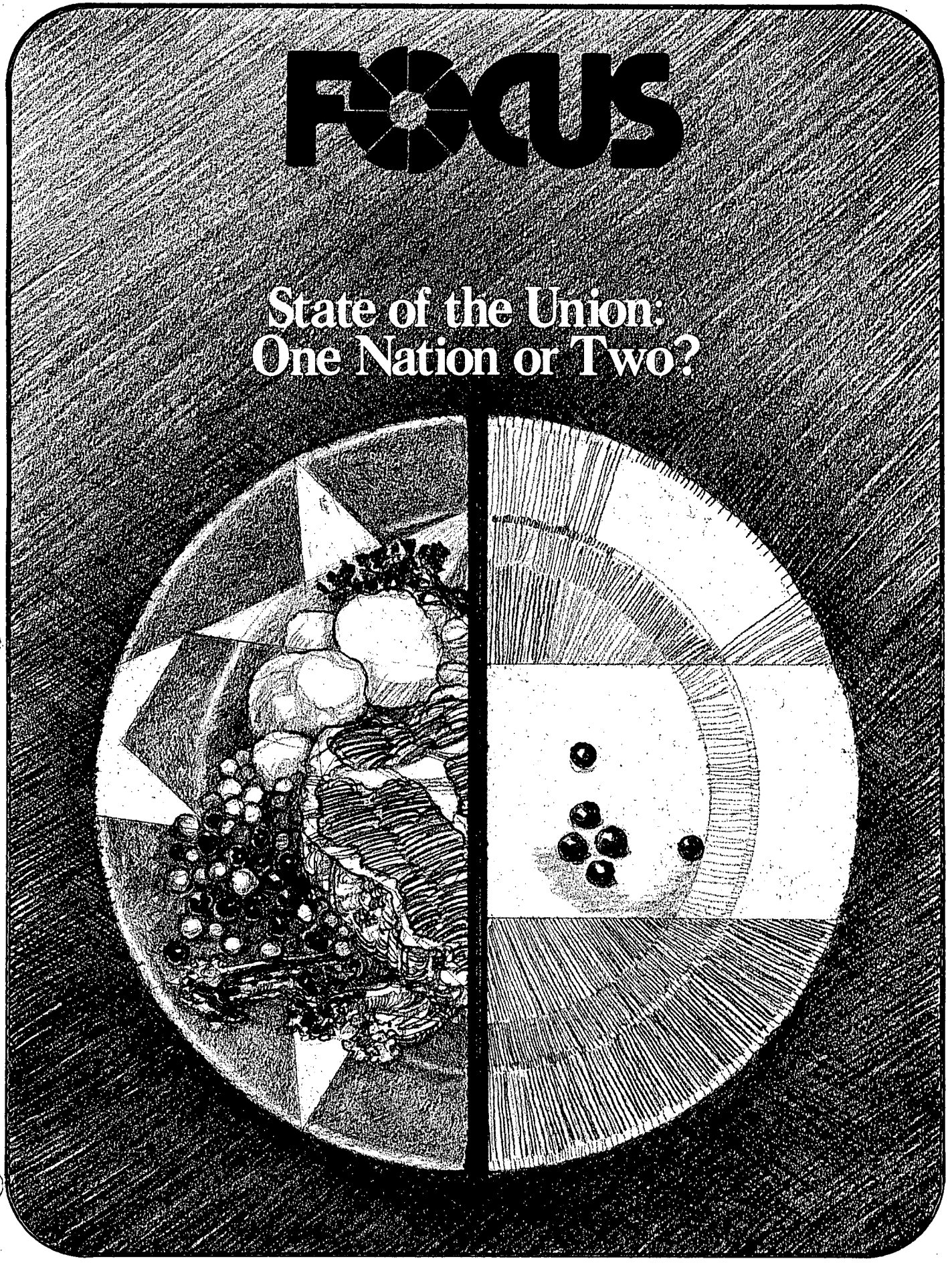
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FOCUS

State of the Union: One Nation or Two?



Joint Center for Political Studies

Perspective

The policy issues that concern blacks today—in employment, housing, education, and health care, to name a few areas—are not as susceptible as the issues of the past to resolution through moral suasion or judicial remedies. With some exceptions—extension of the Voting Rights Act, tax exemptions for segregated schools—the issues are not as simple as whether one sits at a lunch counter or stands outside, whether one rides in the front or the back of the bus. Today's issues are far more complex, because most are not race-specific. They affect whites as well as blacks who occupy the lower rungs of the economic ladder—although even there, blacks still get the shorter end of the stick, owing to the continuing power of racism.

Some are inclined to blame the victims for this continuing disparity. They say blacks are no longer a moral force, that their leaders are ineffective and their organizations are inefficient. Some say we need another Martin Luther King, Jr. to lead us.

The fundamental problem, I believe, is neither one of organization nor one of leadership. Rather, it is a failure by men and women of good will to respond to the urgent need for new civil rights ideas and tactics. We need to find more effective ways of defining the substance of racial problems and to determine new ways of solving them, the "new federalism" and the troubled economy notwithstanding. In the process, we may well find better ways to address some of the organizational and leadership controversies that do exist.

Regardless of what course white Americans take, for blacks any new search for answers should begin with the brightest ideas that the best brains in our community can come up with. Thurgood Marshall went out and found the best black legal minds in the country to map the road to the *Brown* decision. A similar marshaling of minds is needed today to attack what Kenneth B. Clark and John Hope Franklin have called "the complex and intractable racial problems" of the eighties. This thrust will also help to raise the moral, political, and economic consciousness of white America.

At the same time there is a need for more organization and activism at the grass-roots level, where, increasingly, the political and public policy action really is. I foresee a need for more state and local organizations, cutting across traditional interest-group lines and ultimately feeding into a national network, a kind of peoples' PAC.

This is the type of direct political action that Martin Luther King envisioned just before his death. He called for a new civil rights thrust "powerful enough, dramatic enough, morally appealing enough, so that people of good will, the churches, labor, liberals, intellectuals, students, poor people themselves would begin to put pressure on Congressmen" to achieve the goals of a just society. As one author put it, King believed that "racial compassion had to be reinforced by old-fashioned American political *quid pro quo*."

There is growing evidence that this strategy is being pursued by blacks in numerous cities and states around the country. It is being supported by a broad spectrum of the population, including some of our best and brightest as well as the most disadvantaged. It should be encouraged.

The new federalism makes this strategy today's action imperative.

Eddie N. Williams
President

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The Federal Health Budget: Less Is Really Less

by Mark Kleiman

(The author is executive director of the Consumer Coalition for Health. For more detailed information on the federal health budget, the author can be contacted at P.O. Box 50088, Washington, D.C., 20004 or 202 546-5800.)

President Reagan's proposed 1983 budget contains over $5 billion in health cuts, most of which would come from the already underfunded Medicaid and Medicare programs. The cuts come on top of cuts of $1.5 billion in Medicaid and Medicare in the last fiscal year.

There are very few surprises in the health budget. Because the aged vote and are more highly organized than the poor and the minorities, the proposed 1983 cut in Medicare is only 4.5 percent, while Medicaid and other low-income health programs have been targeted for reductions of 22 percent and more.

The only real surprise was the president's offer to "swap" the Food Stamp program and Aid to Families with Dependent Children for Medicaid. Most surprised of all were Secretary of Health and Human Services Richard Schweiker and his top deputies, who learned of the Reagan proposal only shortly before the president offered it to the National Governors Association. The next day, the White House asked HHS to develop a detailed plan for the swap in only 60 days.

The budget proposes to hold down federal costs not by restructuring the delivery system but by shifting the financial burden to the states, consumers, providers, and insurance companies.

Medicaid and Medicare

Many of this year's proposed cuts in Medicaid, like last year's, would fall most heavily upon the working poor. Medicaid is already a bare-bones program, with only 53 percent of those below the poverty line eligible for benefits. Of the 22 million Medicaid beneficiaries, 10 million are children, 5 million are the mothers of those children, and 4 million are blind or disabled.

Most beneficiaries qualify for Medicaid because they are "categorically needy"—that is, they receive AFDC or Supplemental Security Income. Some others who are barely above the poverty level qualify as "medically needy"—too well off for cash assistance but too poor to pay their medical bills.

It is the working poor who are "medically needy" who stand to lose the most under the new Medicaid proposals. The administration proposes to cut federal payments for state medically needy programs by 3 percent. This will encourage states to deny coverage to medically needy persons or to curtail their benefits.

Another proposal would take away 3 percent of federal payments for coverage of the so-called "optional" Medicaid services—those services which states may elect to cover or not cover. These include drugs, eyeglasses, artificial limbs, dentistry, and long-term care in intermediate facilities—services that are hardly optional to those who need them. These two reductions would cut federal Medicaid costs by $600 million.

Reductions of $329 million would come from copayment requirements. At present, states are barred from charging categorically needy Medicaid patients any fees for the "mandatory," basic medical services covered by Medicaid. The administration would require states to charge all Medicaid patients between $1.00 and $1.50 for each physician's visit and $1.00 to $2.00 a day for each inpatient hospital day.

Under California's "copayment experiment" when Reagan was governor, many people deferred seeking needed medical care because they could not afford even such nominal payments on their very tight budgets. Although California's Medicaid program achieved an 8 percent savings in outpatient costs, there was a concomitant 17 percent increase in hospitalization expenses for the same population.

To cut medicare costs, the administration proposes to require the elderly to pay a 25 percent higher deductible under Medicare Part B, which covers only 38 percent of their physician's bills already. Other changes would impose copayment requirements for home health services and would lower the limits on physician charges.

The administration has also accepted a hospital proposal to cut Medicare reimbursement to each hospital by 2 percent rather than making changes oriented more toward cost containment. Walter Weinstein, president of the for-profit hospital chain American Medical International, recently told an American Bar Association conference, "There's not a hospital in the country that can't get around that by simply raising its rates."

Primary Care and Prevention

Lobbying by private providers who rely upon Medicaid dollars has staved off the most severe reductions in these programs. There is no such buffer protecting primary care and prevention programs, and the difference is quite apparent.

Taking inflation into account, funding for Community Health Centers was reduced by 28 percent last year. This year's proposals aim to bring the total reduction to 33.3 percent. Because of last year's cuts, over 2.8 million Americans will lose primary care services or suffer severe cutbacks in local health centers. HHS has acknowledged that 71 percent of those affected by such cuts are black, and another 11 percent are Hispanic.

The new option of state control over the community health centers is an even more serious concern. Health advocates argue that block grants can be counterproductive in states where political priorities overwhelm health policy. In Missouri, for example, cuts in a St. Louis program for high-risk pregnancies will lead to an estimated $1.8 million in additional costs for neonatal intensive care—over seven times the costs being cut.

Federal cutbacks, too, will terminate cost-effective programs such as vaccinations for over 3 million children nationwide. Health officials in North Carolina report that between 80,000 and 100,000 children in rural North Carolina alone will not receive fluoridation services.

(Continued on page 6)

The State of the Union: One Nation or Two?

President Reagan's State of the Union address was more noteworthy for what it did not say than for what it did. The principal domestic issue facing the United States when the president stood before the Congress was the economy. It had been in recession since mid-summer. The general unemployment rate was at 8.9 percent, with black unemployment running above 17 percent. The rate for black teen-agers was off the charts as usual. Industries that employ large amounts of unskilled labor such as automobiles, housing, and steel were especially hard hit by the recession. Persisting high interest rates made economists cautious about the strength or the length of any recovery. Even Americans who weren't immediately affected were worried about an economic slide that might result in conditions worse than any faced by this country since the Depression.

Against that grim background, the president had little comfort to offer other than his steadfast belief that his supply-side experiment will work some day. And the special fears of blacks and other minorities about the administration's lack of sensitivity to their problems and interests were, if anything, fanned rather than doused.

The president said that the guiding principle behind his domestic policies is the "new federalism" (although he did not use the term in his address)—that is, the return of a large portion of the domestic responsibilities of the federal government to the states. With this "single, bold stroke," the president said, we will resolve the problem of an unmanageable and ineffective federal government. But the speech raised apprehensions that, rather than cutting away the inequities and injustices that enfeeble our country, the "single, bold stroke" will cleave the nation in two.

About foreign policy the president said little, promising to address the subject in detail in the near future. But on foreign policy as on domestic, the president's plans portend more rather than less divisiveness.

The "New Federalism"

The appropriate distribution of powers between the federal government and the states of the union has been one of the central and most enduring of the debates about the nature of the United States. A tentative answer was given in the Articles of Confederation, and another was posed in the Constitution. During the Civil War, the question was etched in blood. With the New Deal, Franklin Roosevelt responded to the needs of a nation in anguish by a deep and expansive extension of federal power.

Race has always been close to the center of the debates about the nature of our federalism, because blacks, first as slaves and then as semi-citizens, have been the American anomaly: members of the population, not entirely welcome, but whose blood, sweat, and birthright gave them a powerful claim upon the nation. Before the civil rights movement of the fifties, sixties, and seventies, blacks—particularly those masses who remained in the states of the old Confederacy—beseeched Washington to deliver them from the harshness of parochial racism and poverty into a promised land of Constitutional decency. In dealing with all of America's poor, that is what Franklin Roosevelt began to do; and Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter after that all continued, to one degree or another, on the path that Roosevelt had begun to chart.

The assumption of powers by the federal government that began with the New Deal did not, to be sure, have to do just with blacks or even mainly with them and their rights. There were interstate highways to be built, harbors to be dredged, urban cores to be rebuilt, dams to be erected, air to be cleaned, and moonshots to be launched.

But at the same time, blacks were being bound to the nation by the Constitution and by the core of national morality that developed in Washington and radiated out through the country by way of civil rights, anti-poverty, and urban development legislation. Because of what Washington did, black motorists no longer had to worry about random violence at the hands of a bored or angry southern highway patrolman. They could vote if they wanted to, and, for the poorest of them, slow starvation or a permanent state of malnutrition was no longer an inescapable fate. Because Congress set forth minimum standards of decency and fairness, blacks looked to it as something close to a national conscience. And the White House served as the center of moral authority.

To blacks, therefore, President Reagan's almost casual development of his new federalism proposals, which would spin off much of the federal domestic agenda to state and local governments, is deeply distressing. One need not accept the Democrats' assertion that the new federalism proposals are the president's attempt to divert attention from the woeful state of the economy to understand that the proposals were not systematically thought out. Journalistic accounts of how the proposal came to be tell the tale.

According to reports in both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post,* some of the president's closest advisors became convinced that the budget deficits the country would face if taxes were not increased would be politically unpalatable. They knew Reagan did not want to raise taxes, but they also knew he wanted to shift some federal responsibilities to the states. So, they proposed shifting some federal programs to the states and raising excise taxes to help pay for them. The president went for the distribution of programs, but decided not to raise taxes. Thus, his advisors were left with only the sweetener they had devised to persuade the president to accept a tax increase they thought was necessary.

The "new federalism" that was left is more a concept of how to dismantle a substantial part of the domestic side of the federal government than it is a program. The first part of the plan—the takeover of Medicaid by the federal government in exchange for the takeover of Aid to Families with Dependent Children and Food Stamps by the states—is scheduled to take place in fiscal year 1984. It is difficult to rationalize the shifting of one welfare program to the federal government and two others to the states, but the Reagan administration

argues that since Medicaid is the fastest growing federal program, the states as a whole will be dollars ahead.

The president would also turn back 43 smaller programs, including such basic urban programs as mass transit and sewage treatment, and such vital human services as child nutrition and family planning, to the states in 1984. These programs would be financed by a trust fund from federal excise taxes during the following four years. State participation would be voluntary, and if a state chose to drop one of the programs, it could use the federal money for other state purposes. By 1988, the program would be ended at the federal level and transferred to the states. After that, the trust fund would be diminished by 25 percent each year until it expired in 1991. States that wanted to continue the programs could raise their own taxes.

In any case, President Reagan plans to make cuts in the 43 programs before 1984; thus, if new federalism occurs in any form, the present envisages a reduced rate of assistance from the very beginning of a process that will, at its conclusion, leave even the remnants of the programs in a very endangered condition.

The president's plan is bound to be considered at great length by Congress and the governors and mayors of the country. But the meaning of his proposals should not be lost. They are a new embodiment of the doctrine of states' rights and an unraveling of the moral core of the nation. America's poorest and most vulnerable people are once again to be left to the tender mercies of the states.

President Reagan asserts that the states are more ready to discharge these responsibilities fairly than they were twenty years ago. Hodding Carter, drawing on his long association with the poor states of the South, has expressed the doubts of many in saying that he does not see the evidence that would support the president's optimism.

Foreign Policy

Reporting briefly on his meetings at Ottawa with the industrial powers and at Cancun with the developing nations, the president stated, "I believe lasting friendships were made and the foundation was laid for future cooperation." Current figures show, however, that the United States, still the richest nation in the world, has dropped to nineteenth out of thirty foreign aid donors (in development assistance given as a percentage of gross national product). The United States has reduced its contribution to international developmental lending institutions such as the World Bank for the coming year, leading most other large donors to follow suit and resulting in a significant reduction in the funds available for lending to developing nations. These facts and policies such as the interdiction of refugees from Haiti and the forced return of Ethiopian refugees to their troubled country indicate to the third world an insensitivity to human suffering equal to that suggested by the president's domestic policies.

The president stated in his address that "America will not conduct 'business as usual' with the forces of oppression." He was referring to our relations with the Soviet-backed military regime in Poland. But, as the Congressional Black Caucus has pointed out, the administration has shown willingness if not enthusiasm for conducting "business as usual" with one of the most oppressive regimes in the world—that of South Africa.

"Our foreign policy must be rooted in realism," the president said, "not naivete or self delusion." But one man's realism can be another man's naivete. Europe's problems with inflation, high interest rates, and unemployment are generally worse than ours, and European leaders see continued economic problems here—particularly the high interest rates that still prevail—as a serious threat to their own economies. The administration's tough talk about the Soviet threat has not distracted Europe from the American economic threat.

In fact, European analysts predicted some months ago that the Reagan administration would paint itself into a corner by blustering about its determination to stave off the Soviet threat when it had neither the allies abroad nor the political support at home to back up its claims. The Western European nations have hardly been climbing over one another to embrace the Reagan policies that call for confrontations, if necessary, with Europe literally in the middle. And the president's belligerent rhetoric is often belied by his actions. The discrepancies undermine the very credibility and respect the United States is seeking to obtain. Strong rhetoric coupled with indecision and inconsistency has not led to a "reestablishing of respect for our nation around the globe."

Blacks and the Reagan Administration: What the Polls Show

Last April, the president of the Gallup polling firm, Andrew Korbut, noted that in one of his surveys Ronald Reagan had received approval from 74 percent of the whites in the sample but from only 25 percent of the blacks. Mr. Korbut pointed out that the 49 percent gap represented "one of the largest differences in black/white attitudes toward a political figure ever recorded."

The disparity between black and white political opinions has grown even greater. A representative poll of Americans taken late last year by four nationally recognized polling organizations—Cambridge Survey Research; Hamilton and Staff; Peter Hart Research Associates; and Public Response Analysis—for the Democratic Party shows a far greater distrust of the president's program among blacks than among whites. (Some results of a poll taken a few weeks later for the Republican Party have been released, but no racial breakdowns have been presented.)

The president stated categorically in his State of the Union address, "I can report to you tonight that in the near future the state of the union and the economy will be better—much better. . . ." But when people were asked whether they felt President Reagan's economic program would be good or bad for them personally, whites were divided on whether Reaganomics would pay off for them. Of the whites polled, 35 percent said Reagan's economic program would be good for them as individuals, 34 percent thought it would be bad for

. . . The State of the Union

them personally, and 31 percent were not sure or felt Reagan's plan would have no impact on their personal lives.

No such split divides black Americans in their attitudes toward Reaganomics. An overwhelming 86 percent of black citizens are convinced that President Reagan's economic programs will be bad for them personally. Thus the gap between the attitudes of blacks and whites on the personal impact of Reaganomics has now widened even beyond the 50 percent milestone.

Despite the president's optimism and charm, the people of this country fear that events are going badly. When asked, "Do you feel things in this country are generally going in the right direction or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?" a slight majority of white Americans answered, "the wrong track."

But blacks solidly rejected the notion that things are going right in this country: 85 percent said that things are going "pretty seriously wrong."

Eighty-five precent of the blacks surveyed also said they thought the administration is going too far in its plan to cut back or eliminate government social programs, while only a small plurality—37 percent—of the whites said the cuts go too far. The gap here between black and white attitudes is 48 percent.

In part, these differences stem from a disagreement over priorities. Reagan's agenda of building up defense spending while tearing down the federal government's social role is at odds with the agenda preferred by black citizens. Picking from a list of possible issues, blacks tended to give top priority to such items as "helping the poor and disadvantaged" and "reducing unemployment and stimulating new jobs."

But the disagreement between the president and the black community extends much further than over agenda priorities. There is disagreement over the proper means for achieving desired ends. The president, for example, calls for "a strong national defense to keep America free and at peace." But nearly 3 out of 4 blacks disagreed with the statement that "Ronald Reagan and the Republicans have made a good start in cutting wasteful government spending and building national defense—they have made things better." Almost 2 out of 3 whites agreed with the statement.

Blacks are much more distrustful of Reagan's ability to keep the peace than whites. A majority of blacks strongly agreed with the statement "I'm not sure I would trust Ronald Reagan to handle a major crisis well," while a majority of whites disagreed. When asked whether or not they agreed with the statement: "I am worried that Ronald Reagan is pursuing risky policies that could lead the United States into a war," 8 out of 10 blacks in the sample expressed agreement. In contrast, more whites disagreed with the statement than agreed.

Blacks also overwhelmingly feel that President Reagan fails to care about them as people. When asked in a January CBS poll, "How much do you think Ronald Reagan cares about the needs and problems of people like yourself?" 84 percent of the black respondents said "not much." In contrast, only slightly over a third of the whites in the sample thought that Reagan cared so little about them. When asked if they felt that President Reagan cared about the needs and problems of the poor, not a single black interviewee said he thought Reagan cared "a great deal" and 85 percent said they felt Reagan cared "not much" about the needs of the poor.

What emerges from these findings is a highly coherent and unified perspective on current issues among black citizens across this country. They believe the administration's economic programs have caused them to suffer. They are convinced that the administration has gone too far in cutting back or eliminating federal social programs. They feel that massive defense spending will not lead to security. And they think that things are generally headed down the wrong track in this country in the hands of a president who does not care about them. Whites, on the other hand, have tended to split pro and con Reagan's policies, with a large remainder undecided on most issues.

It is disturbing, in light of what the polls reveal, that rather than attempting to forge a broad coalition of support and taking positive steps to bring minorities into the mainstream, the president seems to be playing off the racial differences in apparently cynical ways.

The disparity between the attitudes of black and white citizens is yet new evidence of the continuing existence of "two nations—one black, one white." But unless the economy takes a sharp turn for the better, the views of blacks are likely to be in the vanguard of a general shift away from support for the Reagan program. As the poor and middle classes of all races share more and more of the burdens of the administration's policies, a greater unity may well emerge—but one in opposition to the president.

(JCPS staff members Jake M. Dyels, Jr., Kenneth H. Thompson, and Roger Wilkins contributed to this article.)

The 1981 edition of the *National Roster of Black Elected Officials* is available. To order, send $23.00 for each copy to the Publications Clerk, Joint Center for Political Studies, 1301 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20004. Orders for single copies must be paid in advance. JCPS will bill for two or more copies, but postage and handling charges will be added to orders that are not prepaid.

The Federal Health Budget . . .

(Continued from page 3)

In a press conference held a few days after the release of the budget, Stan Matek, president of the American Public Health Association, declared, "We do not feel the leaders of this Administration lack good intentions. But they clearly lack awareness of consequences. We feel that the best service we can presently offer our President and our Congress is to criticize what we feel is a skewed and irresponsible budget."

Telescope

Harvard University Summer Program for Senior Executives in State and Local Government

The John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University is seeking candidates for its fourth annual summer program for senior executives in state and local government, to be held July 11-30, 1982. The program is designed for cabinet-level decision makers from state, county, and local governments. Past participants have included ranking state legislators and legislative officials, elected chief executives and policy makers, directors of nonprofit organizations that deliver public services, and federal officials responsible for intergovernmental activities.

Eighty participants will be selected from a nation-wide pool of applicants to participate in classes led by Harvard faculty members with extensive experience with the major issues facing state and local governments. Subjects taught include policy management, leadership styles, management control (cost control, quality assurance, work performance) management information systems, labor relations, and public finance. In addition, participants may select a topic for more intensive study, such as human services management, energy, or community development.

Applications for the 1982 session must be postmarked by April 26. Fellowships are available for applicants from a limited number of states. For more information and an application write the program at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 79 Boylston St., Cambridge, MA 02138, or telephone 617 495-1165.

Education, Race, and Military Service

On February 22, the Department of Defense released a report on a major study designed to compare the educational achievement of new recruits with the educational achievement of the general population of 18-23-year-olds. For the military the results were encouraging: overall, military recruits scored higher on the Defense Department's Armed Forces Qualifications Test than did the youth at large. As the military sees it, this shows that the all-volunteer force is not manned by the nation's dregs, as some critics have charged.

But the results also revealed starkly how much the educational achievement of blacks and Hispanics continues to lag behind that of whites. The mean percentile score for whites was 56; for Hispanics, it was 31; and for blacks, 24. The Pentagon was concerned enough about possible reactions to the report that it attempted to delay announcing them and is still delaying release of the full results.

The numbers are indeed disturbing to many, if hardly surprising. An editorial in the *Washington Post*, for example, said, "Disparities of scores on this scale, among large sectors of the population, are unhealthy and a reproach to a country that asserts equality of opportunity." When the racial and ethnic breakdown of the results is looked at alongside other breakdowns—by geography, levels of spending for education, mother's education—the story that emerges is a cautionary one: if we look for bargain-priced educational and other social programs, we may undermine the very military strength into which funds are being redirected.

The way the AFQT test is now used within the armed services is also of concern. The test is used in assigning recruits to various military occupational specialties. Recruits who score poorly become "grunts"; recruits who score well are assigned to more technical—and less dangerous—jobs. Largely as a result of test performance, nearly half the soldiers in some front-line or combat units are black.

Whether this situation is reasonable or desirable—particularly in light of the acknowledged cultural bias of the test—is an important issue. The Pentagon has taken pains to make clear that the test is not a measure of intelligence or even of general potential. The fact that the test reflects knowledge of "the artifacts of the majority culture" is acceptable, the military says, because it makes the test a practical indicator of how well people will perform in the army. Nevertheless, if the test is used in decisions that have life-and-death implications, the ultimate "practical" results may be objectionable. This issue is among those that will be addressed in the Joint Center's project on Blacks and the Military.

TransAfrica's New Venture: TransAfrica Forum

TransAfrica, the black American lobby for Africa and the Caribbean, has initiated two new publications: *Issue Brief,* which is published monthly and provides up-to-date information concerning international affairs, and the *TransAfrica Forum Journal,* published quarterly, which provides in-depth analyses of issues that affect black communities globally. Both are published through TransAfrica Forum, a new research and educational affiliate of TransAfrica. Randall Robinson, executive director of TransAfrica, says that the new venture "plans to become the cutting edge of policy analysis on U.S. relations with Africa and the Caribbean in the private sector."

TransAfrica was founded in 1977, after a task force on Africa, organized during the Black Leadership Conference of the Congressional Black Caucus, decided that U.S. policy makers had neglected Africa and the Caribbean and the opinions of black Americans on foreign policy issues far too long. Since then, TransAfrica has sought to influence the formation of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa and the Caribbean, and to incorporate the views of black Americans into the decision-making processes.

To achieve its goals, TransAfrica communicates its policy views to Congress, the media, and the administration through various oral and written methods. In the February *Issue Brief,* TransAfrica's newsletter, Randall Robinson interviews Donald F. McHenry, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, about his views on the current administration's policies toward Namibia, with which McHenry has been involved for a number of years, and South Africa.

President Reagan's Caribbean Aid Program

by Jake M. Dyels, Jr.

(The author is a senior fellow at the Joint Center on leave from the U.S. Department of State under its Pearson Fellowship program.)

In a speech at the headquarters of the Organization of American States in Washington, D.C., President Reagan described how the United States will attempt to bolster the economies of several Caribbean nations that are facing serious economic difficulties and to spur long-range economic development in the region as a whole. (For a more thorough discussion of the problems in the region, see the January 1982 issue of *Focus*.)

The Proposal

Addressing the assembled representatives of Caribbean and Central American nations, other nations involved (such as Canada, Venezuela, and Japan), and key members of Congress, President Reagan said that "economic disaster is consuming our neighbors' money reserves and credit, forcing thousands of people to leave for the United States, often illegally, and shaking even the most established democracies. And economic disaster has provided a fresh opening to the enemies of freedom, national independence, and peaceful development." He proposed a long-awaited program of assistance to counter these threats.

In the president's words, the "centerpiece" of his assistance program is a proposal that Congress authorize duty-free entry for a 12-year period of all Caribbean products, except textiles and apparel, that are governed by specific international agreements. If Congress approves the duty-free entry proposal, the plan would be a significant first: no region or country has ever been offered one-way free trade to the United States.

In addition to the no-tariff proposal, the requests being sent to Congress include tax incentives for U.S. investment in the region and an additional foreign assistance appropriation of $350 million, making a FY 1982 total of $823.9 million in assistance to the region.

The Reagan plan also contains provisions for technical assistance and training to help prepare the private sectors of the recipient nations to utilize fully the trade and investment opportunities of the program. Repeating an earlier commitment to coordinate U.S. assistance with on-going assistance programs of Venezuela, Mexico, and Canada, the president promised to encourage Japan and our European allies to participate in the multi-nation assistance effort.

The Debate

Critics and supporters agree that Mr. Reagan's discussion of the problems confronting the region was lucid and well organized. But despite the generally favorable reaction to the president's proposals, their chances for success are being widely debated. Even those who consider the program a significant step forward in hemispheric relations admit that the step may be on uncertain ground down a path laden with pitfalls. Virtually all agree that the $350 million appropriation, $100 million of which is already earmarked for El Salvador, is not enough. Skeptical observers argue that the entire program is likely to dissolve if there is continued fighting or government defeat in El Salvador or if there are other conflicts in Central America, demanding all of the administration's attention.

While Congress is likely to be generally sympathetic to the president's plan and to authorize the economic support funds—perhaps even those requested for security—duty-free entry of Caribbean Basin goods is bound to meet opposition from congressmen who fear that their constituent industries will be threatened. Exceptions, such as those for textiles and apparel and the special duty formula for sugar already in the president's plan, are likely to be sought for other products.

Despite the arguments, however, the president's proposal is important because the leaders of the Caribbean—indeed, all our neighbors to the South—have long waited for a meaningful sign that the United States really cares. President Reagan has at least given a preliminary signal.

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Form 3547 requested

PRICE $1.25

NOTICE TO READERS: Please notify FOCUS of any change of address or title. YOU MUST ATTACH THE MAILING LABEL FROM THE BACK COVER when writing about service or change of address. No change can be made without this information. Allow 6 weeks for change of address to take effect. Thank you.

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT No. 44958
Washington, D.C.