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Perspective

To Our Inestimable Power

Election 2000: A Season of Indecision

While No Clear Presidential Winner Emerged Immediately After the Balloting, African Americans Made Their Votes Count

The One-of-a-Kind Roster

For 30 Years, the Joint Center Has Maintained the Nation's Only Roster of Black Elected Officials, Now Compiled on a Computer Database

TrendLetter

Political Report: 2000 Election Results for Black Candidates to Congressional Offices

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To Our Inestimable Power

Over the years, I have used this space to admonish, cajole, and coax our readers to exercise their sacred right to vote. I have offered every reason I could think of—invoking the millions in other countries around the world who are denied the franchise. I've recounted the sacrifices endured in America, especially during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. I've warned that not voting is tantamount to stilling our collective voice on the affairs of the nation. But now the real circumstances of a deadlocked presidential election have illustrated more dramatically than my words ever could that the votes of all Americans really do determine who our leaders will be and what direction our country will take.

What has also been clearly illustrated is that the impact of African American voters on the election was huge. According to the exit polls, in the close race for the White House, black voters provided Vice President Al Gore with the margin of victory in several states where most white voters marked their ballots for Governor Bush (see feature). African Americans made the critical difference in six senate races and two contests for state houses as well. They helped elect 39 African Americans (38 incumbents) to seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. The black vote was also a factor in countless other state and local elections. In the face of these facts, it is my great hope that we can excise from our thinking, once and for all, the notion that one vote doesn't make any difference.

African Americans are indeed a major force in how the nation is governed. Yet our power is still underestimated. We are certainly underestimated by the Republican Party, which hasn't made any serious effort to attract our support or address our concerns in Congress or other governmental bodies. Indeed, over the last 20 years, Republicans in the White House and on Capitol Hill have been generally hostile to some of our major interests. This hostility has cost the GOP dearly as African Americans, perceiving no other viable alternative, gave 90 percent of their support to Democratic candidates at the polls, more than any other racial or ethnic group. If the presidential vote recount in Florida, still underway as we go to press, puts Vice President Gore in the White House, the GOP will have four years to rethink its approach to black voters.

We are also underestimated by many Democrats—who rely on a solid base of black support but have been soft advocates for black priorities, like bringing an end to racial profiling. Nevertheless, Al Gore and Democratic congressional candidates benefitted from a strong black turnout on November 7. But while a great deal of energy was expended by the Gore campaign to woo non-committed voters—which made a certain amount of sense—black political observers have charged that if just a small portion of that effort was added to the endeavors to energize the black vote, Al Gore would have fared much better on election night.

Finally, we have underestimated ourselves. Yes, the black vote was decisive in many local, state, and congressional elections. But overall black voter turnout was estimated at only 51 percent of those eligible to vote. That means our potential to have an even greater impact on politics in America has yet to be realized. ■



PRESIDENT



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Election 2000: A Season of Indecision

While No Clear Presidential Winner Emerged Immediately After the Balloting, African Americans Made Their Votes Count

by David C. Ruffin

Election 2000 treated Americans to a civics lesson that not even the most clairvoyant of political pundits could have predicted. As FOCUS goes to press three weeks after the polls closed, the race for the White House remains undecided, with the winner of Florida's 25 electoral votes still contested in the courts. The post-election deadlock appears to reflect the electorate's genuine indecision, and parallels the 50-50 split between the two major parties in the U.S. Senate and the narrow GOP majority in the House. Despite this indecision, African American voters were a major factor in the presidential sweepstakes, several U.S. Senate races, and gubernatorial elections in Missouri and North Carolina.

What has captured the nation's attention and that of much of the world has been the presidential contest, in which Vice President Al Gore won the popular vote by more than 300,000 ballots. In the race for the White House, the two major candidates had the support of a mix of groups from different income, racial, and ethnic groups. According to nationwide exit polls, the supporters of Republican Texas Governor George W. Bush and his running mate, former Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, were mostly white, middle and upper income, and male. The Bush-Cheney ticket drew heavily from opponents of gun control and those supporting across-the-board tax breaks. Bush swept the Old Confederacy (with Florida still counting and recounting) and the nearby states of Kentucky, West Virginia, and Oklahoma. He also took Arizona and the Rocky Mountain and Plains states.

Those who voted for Al Gore and his running mate Senator Joe Lieberman were far more diverse demographically. Gore topped Bush in support from African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, Jews, gays, and women of all races. He also did well among union households and proponents of reproductive rights. This diversity was invaluable in key states that contributed to Gore's electoral vote total. Gore won all the Northeastern (except New Hampshire) and Mid-Atlantic states, as well as the Mid-Western states of Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. He also won all the West Coast states and Hawaii.

The most loyal Gore supporters, by far, were African Americans—90 percent of whom voted for his ticket. By all accounts, without Gore's black support, George W. Bush would have won the White House in a landslide, since Gore lost the white vote nationwide. Black voters provided the margins of victory in several states where he lost the white vote, including Pennsylvania (with 23 electoral votes),

Illinois (22 electoral votes), Michigan (18 electoral votes), Wisconsin (11 electoral votes), and Maryland (10 electoral votes), as well as Delaware (three electoral votes) where Gore and Bush split the white vote in a dead heat. The exit polls show that Gore narrowly lost the white vote in California but carried the black and Latino votes by 86 percent and 68 percent, respectively.

A major effort to generate large and targeted black voter turnout was carried out by a variety of organizations, including the NAACP, which spent more than \$10 million through its Voter Empowerment Program and National Voter Fund. Two public relations firms were retained and ads were placed in major media markets in 17 states. Bus tours and rallies featuring local officials and celebrities saturated black communities in the Mid-Western states of Michigan, Missouri, Illinois, Ohio and throughout the South in Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, and the Carolinas. Registrars were dispatched to key states with laptop computers and cell phones. Black leaders like NAACP CEO Kweisi Mfume, Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.), and Rev. Jesse Jackson crisscrossed the country to encourage black voter participation. On election day, during his syndicated morning show popular radio personality Tom Joyner urged black listeners to go to the polls.

Frustrating these efforts, however, were voter intimidation and deliberate acts of disenfranchisement reported in several states. In Florida, for example, complaints surfaced about racial profiling of black males by police officers near polling sites. Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Haitian-Americans were turned away from the polls by election officials. Names were purged from voter rolls, and some blacks were asked to show photo identification where whites weren't. Some black communities received defective and antiquated voting machinery and reported that polling locations were changed without notice. Civil rights organizations held a field hearing in Florida on November 11 to investigate these complaints of fraud and intimidation.

Blacks Hold Their Own in the House

In addition to the presidential campaign, 34 Senate seats and all seats in the House of Representatives were up for election. Black members of the House held their own at 39 as 38 incumbents were reelected (see Political Report in this issue). And William L. Clay, Jr., of St. Louis, was easily elected to succeed his father in Missouri's 1st congressional district. William L. Clay, Sr., one of the founding organizers of the Congressional Black Caucus, had retired from the seat after 32 years on Capitol Hill.

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Black candidates for two other open seats were not successful. Joan Johnson, town clerk of Islip, New York (on Long Island), attempted to make history by becoming the first black female Republican member of Congress. She ran for New York's 2nd district seat, left vacant by Republican Rick Lazio who ran for the U.S. Senate against Hillary Rodham Clinton in a losing effort. Johnson lost to Democrat Steve B. Israel, the majority leader of the Huntington Town Board, by a vote of 48 percent to 34 percent. Black Democrat Lawrence A. Davies, a Baptist pastor and former mayor of Fredericksburg, failed to win Virginia's 1st congressional district seat. He was defeated by a vote of 58 percent to 37 percent by Republican JoAnn Davis, a realtor and member of the Virginia House of Delegates. The seat became vacant when nine-term Republican Herbert H. Bateman died in September.

Oklahoma Representative J.C. Watts remained the sole black Republican in the House, although 24 black Republicans ran for House seats on November 7. Among other reelected House members were non-voting delegates Eleanor Holmes Norton of the District of Columbia and Donna Christensen of the Virgin Islands. The black members of the House are likely to have a great impact on the 107th Congress, where Republicans will enjoy only a four-seat majority over the Democrats.

Several candidates launched spirited challenges against House veterans. In Kentucky, black Democrat Eleanor Jordan went after two-term Republican Anne Northup in the state's 3rd congressional district, which is 18 percent black and is centered in Louisville. Northup, who won her last two races by narrow margins, was seen as vulnerable. Despite a hard-fought campaign, Jordan fell short on election day with 45 percent of the vote to Northup's 53 percent. Three black House Democratic incumbents faced serious challenges—Corrine Brown (Fla.-3), Sanford Bishop (Ga.-2), and Cynthia McKinney (Ga.-4). Ever since the boundaries of their once majority-black congressional districts were redrawn in the mid-1990s, these black representatives have had challengers who have each garnered the support of more than 40 percent of the voters.

A 50-50 Senate

Democrats made their most significant gains on Capitol Hill in the Senate, where they ended up with half the seats. This 50-50 split in the upper house of Congress, however, was under challenge at press time. The votes in Democratic former Congresswoman Maria Cantwell's narrow victory over incumbent Republican Slade Gorton were being recounted in Washington state.

In other races, exit polls revealed that the black vote made the difference in several Senate Democratic wins. Victorious Democratic Senate candidates lost the white vote by at least five percentage points in Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, and New York. And in each case, the black vote was greater than the margin of victory. Black

voters served Republican Senator John Ashcroft of Missouri a stunning defeat by helping to elect his opponent, popular Democratic Governor Mel Carnahan, who was killed in a plane crash three weeks before the election. (Carnahan's death occurred too late in the campaign to remove his name from the ballot.) Democrat Roger Wilson, who succeeded Carnahan in the governor's mansion, announced that he would appoint the candidate's widow Jean to the Senate seat if her husband's name received most of the votes in the election.

While Ashcroft won the white vote (53 percent to 46 percent), black voters, who made up 12 percent of the electorate, delivered 82 percent of their votes to Mel Carnahan (and therefore to Jean) pushing him over the top in a tight final 51 to 49 vote tally. Many black voters were settling a score with Ashcroft, who had convinced all of his Republican colleagues in the Senate to reject the confirmation of black Missouri Supreme Court Justice Ronnie White to a federal district court judgeship. Probably going on the theory that it's always politically beneficial to appear to be "tough on crime," Ashcroft charged that Justice White was "pro-criminal." The senator also said that the justice had a "serious bias against the death penalty" even though White upheld death sentences 41 times.

Including Cantwell, Democrats won 19 of the 34 U.S. Senate seats in contention this election, and the Republicans won 15 seats. Shifting from a 46-seat minority to controlling half the Senate seats will give the Democrats powerful leverage in the 107th Congress when it comes to power sharing and moving the legislative agenda. If Cantwell emerges the winner in her race, the number of women in the Senate will reach an all-time high of 13 (the 106th Congress had the most women so far with nine).

Drug Treatment Instead of Prison Terms

In addition to candidates for presidential, congressional, state, and local offices, many state ballots included referenda on a range of issues. California voters changed that state's policy on how it will deal with drug abuse by approving Proposition 36. The measure will bar state courts from imposing prison sentences on first and second offenses for nonviolent drug possession cases and will require drug treatment instead. The mandatory treatment provision even applies to users of hard drugs like heroin and cocaine. Proposition 36 takes a dramatic departure from the "tough on crime," "lock 'em up" approach and views drug abuse as a health problem.

Estimates are that the measure could keep as many as 37,000 drug users out of jail each year in California and enable the state to forego the construction of a new \$500 million prison. Advocates for reforming the nation's drug enforcement laws hailed the California vote as the first time in decades that drug abuse policy will significantly reduce the number of incarcerated Americans, who now number around 2 million. Adoption of Proposition 36 could influence federal policy in the prosecution of the War on Drugs, which currently allocates two-thirds of its resources to

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The One-of-a-Kind Roster

For 30 Years, the Joint Center Has Maintained the Nation's Only Roster of Black Elected Officials, Now Compiled on a Computer Database

This article is one of a continuing series of articles updating issues addressed in FOCUS over the years as a part of the Joint Center's 30th anniversary celebration.

In its early years, the Joint Center focused on the rapidly growing cadre of black elected officials (BEOs) who came into office in the wake of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Many of these BEOs emerged in southern states. In fact, the early work of the Joint Center centered on providing technical assistance to fledgling officials, very few of whom had previously held public office. The Joint Center's inaugural roster of BEOs, published in 1970, was a slim volume that contained just 1,469 names. This unique annually updated resource has been used by scholars, libraries, the media, and political analysts ever since. It was issued in book form from 1970 to 1993, and today it is a vast computerized database and the world's only compilation of all African Americans elected to various posts across the nation. The following is an abstract of an analysis written by Joint Center political scientist David Bositis, which will appear in the forthcoming printed booklet, Black Elected Officials: A Statistical Summary, 1999.

Between January 1998 and January 1999, the number of black elected officials (BEOs) in the United States increased by 68, from 8,868 to 8,936, a historic high. The largest category was municipal officials, whose total grew by 153 positions. Among all other categories there was a net decrease of 85 BEOs.

The 10 states with the largest number of black elected officials in 1999 were: Mississippi (850), Alabama (725), Louisiana (714), Illinois (627), Georgia (584), South Carolina (542), North Carolina (506), Arkansas (504), Texas (479), and Michigan (338). This top-ten ranking is identical to the ranking in 1998. In 1999, Hawaii, Idaho, Maine, Montana, North and South Dakota, and Wyoming had no black elected officials.

Female BEOs. Since 1970, the growth in the number of female BEOs has been dramatic, rising from 160 that year to 2,997 in 1999. In 1970, women made up only 10.9 percent of all BEOs; in 1999, they represented 33.5 percent—an all-time high.

While 33.5 percent of all BEOs are women, there are some significant gender differences in some offices, although the proportions changed little between 1998 and 1999. In four categories of elected offices, the proportion of female BEOs roughly approximates the overall average of 33.5 percent: federal (35.9 percent), state (31.1 percent), municipal (33.8 percent), and judicial/law enforcement (30.2 percent). However, the proportion of black women holding county-level office (19.8 percent) is substantially lower than

the average. In the education category, women are closest in proportion to men. In 1999, 41.8 percent of all BEOs in education were women.

Black mayors. The number of black mayors nationwide has increased from 445 to 450. The number of black mayors of big cities (with populations greater than 50,000) actually declined by one, hence the small increase in black mayors has occurred entirely in small cities. Among big-city mayors, the most significant BEO event was the election of John Street as mayor of Philadelphia. Since 1998, Kansas City and Pasadena dropped off the big-city BEO mayoral list. It is worth noting that of the big cities with black mayors in 1999, most (59.0 percent) do not have black majority populations.

Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). The number of black members elected to Congress remained unchanged at 39. This is the last year of service for Rep. William L. Clay, Sr., (D-Mo.), who is completing his 16th term in the U.S. House of Representatives. (He was replaced by his son, Missouri State Senator William L. Clay, Jr., who was elected this November.) Following Clay's retirement, Reps. John Conyers (D-Mich.) and Charles Rangel (D-NY) will be the only CBC members remaining who were serving at the time the CBC was started in 1971.

The decade of the 1990s was a remarkable period of turnover in the membership of the CBC. Of the 39 African Americans serving in the U.S. House of Representatives, 31 have been elected since 1990. Presently, there are 14 women in the CBC, about 36 percent of the total; in 1990 there was only one woman in the CBC. There is only one black Republican in the House, Rep. J.C. Watts (Okla.), who is chairman of the House Republican Conference, the number-four position in the House body's Republican leadership.

Since 1870, a total of 104 African Americans have served in Congress—four in the U.S. Senate and 100 in the U.S. House of Representatives. Eighty-two of these black legislators were elected in the 20th century, with 22 serving during the 19th century. Of the 104 African Americans who have served in Congress, 44 have represented districts from the states of the old confederacy, half serving during Reconstruction and 60 representing districts outside of the South. Of the total, 84 have been men and 20 have been women. Of the 20 women who have served, 12 (or 60 percent) are presently in office.

State legislators. The number of black state legislators increased from 567 to 569. The number of black state senators remained the same, at 142, while the number of

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enforcement and only one-third to treatment.

Meanwhile, California voters said "No" to Proposition 38, which would have provided an education voucher of \$4,000 to any child in the state to attend any school, including private and religious schools. A strong majority of 71 percent of California voters turned the voucher initiative down. The measure wasn't just targeted to poor children, but would have applied to all of California's 6.6 million school children, including the 650,000 already in parochial or other private schools. Another initiative in Michigan, Proposal 1, would have authorized school vouchers valued at \$3,300 to go to parents of children attending schools in districts that graduated fewer than two-thirds of their students. It was rejected by 69 percent of Michigan voters there.

Voters in Colorado and Oregon adopted initiatives requiring background checks of all purchasers of firearms at gun shows. Gun control proponents brought the measures to the ballot after the legislatures in both states failed to pass bills requiring checks. The ballot measures succeeded in the face of heavy opposition from the National Rifle Association.

Finally, 60 percent of Alabama voters overturned a 1901 state constitutional provision prohibiting marriage across color lines. The vote has only symbolic significance, since the U.S. Supreme Court has already struck down all such laws. But backers of the initiative, seeking to eliminate vestiges of the state's dark legacy of segregation, noted that Alabama was the last state with a law banning interracial marriage still on the books. ■

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black state representatives grew from 425 to 427. The states with the most black members in their legislatures are Mississippi (45), followed by Georgia (43), Maryland (38), Alabama (35), and South Carolina (33).

Regional distribution of BEOs. There continued to be significant regional differences in the number of black elected officials. In 1998 the South was the region with the largest number of BEOs (6,137 or 69.0 percent of the national total). In the Northeast, the number increased from 817 to 821, and in the Midwest the number increased from 1,570 to 1618. Finally, the western states witnessed an actual decline in the number of BEOs from 324 to 320.

Much of the growth in BEOs during the 1990s can be attributed to the Voting Rights Act and the redistricting that followed the 1990 Census. The next major period to watch for changes in trends in the number of black elected officials will be the next post-redistricting period, between 2001 and 2002. ■

Joint Center Awarded Census Information Center (CIC) Status

On October 30, the U.S. Census Bureau designated the Joint Center as a Census Information Center. The Joint Center was one of 59 organizations awarded CIC status in an intense competition. This unique status was awarded to the Joint Center based on its capacity to provide data and analyses on minority populations via its unique DataBank. As a CIC, the Joint Center has priority access to the full array of data products released by the Bureau, and will serve as a repository of census data. To learn more about DataBank, visit the Joint Center web site at www.jointcenter.org.

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TRENDLETTER

POLITICAL REPORT

2000 ELECTION RESULTS FOR BLACK CANDIDATES TO CONGRESSIONAL OFFICES

U.S. House of Representatives

State	Congressional District	Winner	Vote	Defeated	Vote
Alabama	7th District	*Earl Hilliard (D)	75	Ed Martin (R)	24
California	9th District	*Barbara Lee (D)	86	Arneze Washington (R)	10
	32nd District	*Julian Dixon (D)	84	Kathy Williamson (R)	13
	35th District	*Maxine Waters (D)	87	Carl McGill (R)	11
	37th District	*Juanita McDonald (D)	83	Vernon Van (R)	12
Colorado	1st District	*Diana DeGette (D)	69	Jesse Thomas (R)	28
District of Columbia	At-Large	*Eleanor Holmes Norton (D)	100	Edward Wolterbeek (R)	0
Florida	3rd District	*Corrine Brown (D)	58	Jennifer Carroll (R)	42
	17th District	*Carrie Meek (D)	100	Unopposed	0
	23rd District	*Alcee Hastings (D)	76	Bill Lambert (R)	24
Georgia	2nd District	*Sanford Bishop (D)	53	Dylan Glenn (R)	47
	4th District	*Cynthia McKinney (D)	60	Sunny Warren (R)	40
	5th District	*John Lewis (D)	77	Hank Schwab (R)	23
Illinois	1st District	*Bobby Rush (D)	88	Ray Wardingley (R)	12
	2nd District	*Jesse Jackson, Jr. (D)	90	Robert Gordon (R)	10
	7th District	*Danny K. Davis (D)	86	Robert Dallas (R)	14
Indiana	10th District	*Julia Carson (D)	59	Marvin Scott (R)	40
Kentucky	3rd District	*Anne Northup (R)	53	Eleanor Jordan (D)	45
Louisiana	2nd District	*William Jefferson (D)	100	Unopposed	0
Maryland	4th District	*Albert Wynn (D)	88	John Kimble (R)	12
	7th District	*Elijah Cummings (D)	87	Kenneth Kondner (R)	13
Michigan	14th District	*John Conyers (D)	90	William Ashe (R)	10
	15th District	*Carolyn Kilpatrick (D)	90	Chrysanthea Boyd-Fields (R)	10
Minnesota	5th District	*Martin Sabo (D)	70	Frank Taylor (R)	23

2000 ELECTION RESULTS FOR BLACK CANDIDATES TO CONGRESSIONAL OFFICES

U.S. House of Representatives

State	Congressional District	Winner	Vote	Defeated	Vote
Mississippi	2nd District	* Bennie Thompson (D)	65	Hardy Caraway (R)	32
Missouri	1st District	William Clay, Jr. (D)	76	Z. Dwight Billingsly (R)	22
	5th District	* Karen McCarthy (D)	69	Steve Gordon (R)	29
New Jersey	10th District	* Donald Payne (D)	88	Dirk Weber (R)	12
	13th District	* Robert Menendez (D)	79	Theresa de Leon (R)	19
New York	2nd District	Steve Israel (D)	48	Joan Johnson (R)	34
	6th District	* Gregory Meeks (D)	100	Unopposed	0
	10th District	* Edolphus Towns (D)	90	Ernestine Brown (R)	6
	11th District	* Major Owens (D)	88	Susan Cleary (R)	7
	15th District	* Charles Rangel (D)	91	Jose Augustin Suero (R)	6
	19th District	* Sue Kelly (R)	62	Lawrence Otis Graham (D)	36
	31st District	* Amo Houghton (R)	77	Kisun Peters (D)	23
North Carolina	1st District	* Eva Clayton (D)	66	Duane Kratzer, Jr. (R)	33
	4th District	* David Price (D)	62	Jess Ward (R)	37
	12th District	* Mel Watt (D)	65	Chad Mitchell (R)	34
Ohio	2nd District	* Rob Portman (R)	74	Charles Sanders (D)	24
	11th District	* Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D)	86	James Sylota (R)	12
Oklahoma	4th District	* J.C. Watts (R)	65	Larry Weatherford (D)	32
Pennsylvania	2nd District	* Chaka Fattah (D)	99	Unopposed	1
South Carolina	3rd District	* Lindsay Graham (R)	68	George Brightharp (D)	31
	6th District	* James Clyburn (D)	73	Vince Ellison (R)	26
Tennessee	9th District	* Harold Ford, Jr. (D)	100	Unopposed	0
Texas	18th District	* Sheila Jackson Lee (D)	77	Bob Levy (R)	23
	30th District	* Eddie B. Johnson (D)	92	Unopposed	8
Virginia	1st District	Jo Ann Davis (R)	58	Lawrence Davis (D)	37
	3rd District	* Robert Scott (D)	100	Unopposed	0
	5th District	* Virgil Goode (I)	68	John Boyd, Jr. (D)	31
Virgin Islands	At-Large	* Donna Christian-Christensen (D)	100	Unopposed	0
U.S. Senate					
Massachusetts		* Edward M. Kennedy (D)	73	Jack E. Robinson (R)	13
Mississippi		* Trent Lott (R)	66	Troy D. Brown (D)	32

KEY: Black candidates' names are **bold** , * indicates incumbent, party affiliation: (D) Democrat (R) Republican (I) Independent.

ECONOMIC REPORT

by George Cave

Reauthorizing Welfare Reform

In August 1996, President Clinton signed into law a welfare reform measure that constituted a fundamental shift in income-support policy for the poor. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act repealed the cash welfare program known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and replaced it with a new program, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The new law took away the longstanding safety net of cash welfare available as long as a family needed it, and instituted five major new provisions: (1) time limits; (2) welfare work requirements; (3) welfare block grants to states; (4) child-support reimbursement; and (5) flexible regulations that “devolved” authority to the states for all aspects of the program other than provisions (1) through (4).

Time limits and work requirements have resulted in dramatic declines in the welfare rolls. TANF imposes significant pressure on beneficiaries of public assistance to leave welfare for work, even if their earnings do not fully replace lost welfare income, and even if such work leaves no time for education or training that could pull their families out of poverty in the long run. The new program was funded through September 2001, and the 107th Congress must reconsider and reauthorize it. Therefore, now is the time to assess and repair features of welfare reform which are causing undesirable consequences.

The block-grant financing of welfare under the new law has made state welfare policies appear to be

more generous since most state governments are currently operating at budget surpluses. This may not be the case during times of deep recession when TANF’s ill effects on the safety net for the poor are likely to be evident. However, three clearly undesirable effects of the legislation have already emerged:

- a decrease in medical coverage for poor adults;
- a decline in Food Stamp use; and
- a sharp drop in college attendance, education, and training among welfare recipients.

Further, in the near future another consequence of the reform is likely to appear in many states: Low-skill breadwinners, who put in a full work week and even overtime, but who were paid so little that they still could receive TANF while working, will lose their welfare safety net forever.

Medical Coverage for Poor Adults

Since few low-wage jobs offer affordable health insurance, poor adults who leave welfare or are denied assistance are unlikely to be insured if they lose or do not receive Medicaid. Sharp declines in adult health insurance coverage have already been attributed to the 1996 law. (Fortunately, the growing Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) apparently saves many children from their parents’ fate.) The Census Bureau, which measures the proportion of the poor without health insurance coverage for an entire year, has reported that, for poor adults ages 25 to 34, this proportion grew from 45.5 percent in 1995 to 47.5 percent in 1997, 49.2 percent in 1998, and 51.9 percent in 1999. Such a pattern for uninsured adults during rapid economic expansion is consistent with the explanation that it has been an unintended consequence of the welfare reform law.

Before the TANF law was passed, Medicaid was closely linked to cash welfare. In virtually all cases, eligibility for AFDC meant eligibility for Medicaid. The intent of the 1996 law was to move large numbers of families off cash welfare while largely leaving them on the Medicaid rolls. Congress did not intend for welfare leavers to have their Medicaid cases wrongfully closed, or for rejected and diverted welfare applicants still eligible for Medicaid not to receive it.

After being pushed into the workforce by time limits, a family whose income continues to be low remains eligible for Medicaid and Food Stamps. Many parents, however, may not have realized they were still eligible for these programs when they left TANF or were diverted away from it. But in too many cases, the burden for retaining their Medicaid and Food Stamp benefits has been placed on families who may not understand the new rules. At the same time, many state agencies are not set up to enroll eligible families automatically.

To ameliorate this problem, Congress intended for states to break their administrative links between welfare and Medicaid. A total of \$500 million was made available to the states for “de-linking” TANF and Medicaid through generous federal matching funds.

Unfortunately, much of the “de-linking” money remained unspent for several years. In some states, welfare offices were transformed into “job placement centers,” which may appear to poor people as inappropriate places to ask about Medicaid or Food Stamps. In some states, arrangements were made to facilitate applications for Medicaid and Food Stamps at clinics, food banks, or other places where eligible poor people might be found.

In part, these declines in Medicaid coverage reflect the initial success of the TANF law in stimulating low-wage

employment. While Congress kept the income eligibility limits for Medicaid the same as pre-TANF income eligibility limits for AFDC, in many states these limits were so low that minimum-wage employment disqualified parents for Medicaid. For example, annual eligibility limits for parents with two children were \$3,168 in Louisiana, \$4,572 in Virginia, and \$4,728 in Texas.

Under the TANF law, parents leaving welfare for work were supposed to receive transitional Medicaid for at least six months, but many states had not established transitional Medicaid programs in time to serve most welfare leavers.

In addition to declining Medicaid rolls, substantially reduced Food Stamp use also may be attributed to TANF. According to a report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, in 1995 some 88 percent of poor children received Food Stamp assistance, but by 1998 this had dropped to 70 percent.

Lifetime Limits

As explained in the May 2000 Economic Report in *FOCUS*, the most far-reaching 1996 change in welfare was, in most places, a lifetime time limit that varied from state to state but never exceeded five years. After receiving a total of at most 60 monthly checks, a lifetime ban on further welfare goes into effect. Some states have gone beyond the new federal requirement to impose lifetime time limits much shorter than five years. A few other states have “fixed period” time limits, under which a family that has “hit” the time limit must leave the TANF rolls, but may re-apply after a period of months or years.

After a poor family has reached its time limit, no additional cash assistance will be available for rent, children’s clothes, transportation, or any other family needs. The threat of

having no cash in the future is likely to promote caution in using up the checks. If there is any way to survive without drawing welfare, most recipients may choose to “bank” welfare for use in future emergencies only and try to get by on low-wage employment. Thus, the early effects of time limits are likely to be dramatic declines in the welfare rolls and higher rates of employment among welfare leavers, compared to what would have occurred without TANF.

And, indeed, from August 1996, when the President signed the TANF law, to December 1999 the national welfare caseload decreased by 49 percent. In states where time limits are accompanied by financial incentives to combine work with welfare, and in states with relatively high benefits, welfare families are likely to use up their months of eligibility faster than in other states.

Eventually, a certain proportion of families will exhaust their eligibility for welfare. In many states, it is ironic that the long-term result of welfare reform may well be the same for those who played by the new rules and worked hard as for those who subsisted on welfare alone: both kinds of TANF recipients ultimately will exhaust their cash welfare safety nets.

College Disincentives

Under TANF, every adult on welfare is expected to go to work. Those who cannot find jobs must take part in activities intended to make them more employable. To avoid TANF “sanctions” (benefit suspensions), adults receiving welfare must engage in “work activities,” including subsidized or unsubsidized employment, unpaid community service work, job search and job readiness assistance, and vocational educational training not to exceed 12 months.

However, basic education wards off sanctions only for those without high

school diplomas or GEDs. For job training to count as a TANF work activity, the welfare recipient must simultaneously average at least 20 hours per week in other work activities. These work requirements make it very difficult for welfare recipients to participate in the kinds of education and training that could pull them out of poverty in the long run, including degree and certificate programs at four-year and two-year colleges and other post-secondary education institutions. Early reports have measured post-reform declines of more than 50 percent in college attendance among welfare recipients.

Reform Recommendations

Welfare reauthorization offers opportunities for correcting TANF shortcomings. This Economic Report has dealt only with a few welfare reform issues where undesirable consequences of the 1996 law already seem to have emerged clearly:

- **Food Stamps and Healthcare.** Congress should set up mechanisms for monitoring the health insurance coverage and Food Stamp use of the poor, and provide strong incentives for states to enroll eligible families in Medicaid, CHIP, and Food Stamps.
- **Education and Training.** Congress should reconsider work requirement rules that deter poor people from earning valuable degrees and education certificates, and draw on the experiences of community colleges to help reverse this undesirable trend.
- **True Limits.** Congress and the states must take action to ensure that families who have played by the rules and have done what was asked of them under TANF regulations will not fall through the welfare safety net. ■