

when Clinton signed PRWORA, penned an angry letter to the *Washington Post* in February of this year, responding to a commentary by Rebecca Blank and Ron Haskins, which claimed that none of the problems predicted by critics of the 1996 welfare law has materialized. "This is like trivializing an earthquake because it didn't kill as many people as expected," Edelman wrote.

In fact, he continued, "research shows that about 40% of the 2.5-plus million women who have gone off welfare [since 1996] have neither a job nor cash assistance. This means that more than a million women, who have more than 2 million children, are in a precarious position. Many have moved in with extended families, although those arrangements are often unstable and will be jeopardized whenever a recession reduces the income stream coming into those households. And significant numbers have been unable to cope. Homeless shelters all over the country are bursting at the seams."

In February, Edelman concluded his letter with the following: "That it has not been worse is the result of our increased prosperity." Today, that prosperity is but a distant memory, and the situation is indeed getting much worse.

A major earthquake now confronting already financially strapped states, is the Federally imposed five-year lifetime limit for cash assistance on the welfare program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). PROWORA specified that all Federal funds for cash assistance would be cut off to individuals after they have been on the welfare rolls for five years.

According to the D.C.-based State Policy Documentation Project, in 16 states which adopted a shorter time limit than the Federal five-year plan, that time limit was over prior to January 2000. In four states, it expired in 2000. In 29 states, the Federal five-year limit expires this year or next. In only two states, is there no time limit under state law.

So, for instance, in Pennsylvania, 12,000 families will be without cash assistance in March 2002, with no provision in place for caring for them. In Louisiana, which imposed a welfare limit of two years in every five, layoffs are now hitting thousands of low-wage workers who have already used up their two-year limit.

The *Wall Street Journal* warned on Sept. 10 that the new, record round of layoffs hitting the U.S. economy this Summer, is striking the low end of the labor force—low-skilled workers and minorities. These workers, many just off the welfare rolls, have not worked long enough to qualify for unemployment insurance (which requires applicants to have worked at least six months of a year—earnings in the last three to six months do not count in computing the unemployment benefit).

With no unemployment insurance, and no cash assistance from TANF, what is to happen to millions of Americans when the full force of the onrushing depression hits? Franklin Roosevelt's welfare policy was created for just such a circumstance. Do Bush and his new army of faith-based prostitutes have any plan? Or do they just have "faith" in money?

Interview: Peter Edelman

Faith-Based Initiative Won't Solve The Problem

Dr. Peter Edelman, a professor at Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C., was an Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services during the first Clinton Administration. He resigned from that position in 1996, in protest of President Clinton's signing of the welfare reform legislation, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). Dr. Edelman spoke with Marianna Wertz on Sept. 10.

EIR: I'm preparing an article on the reauthorization of the welfare bill, the status of states where the five years are running out, and the relationship between welfare reform and the Faith-Based Initiative. What is your view on these issues?

Edelman: My concern about the Faith-Based Initiative, apart from constitutional questions, which I think are serious, and apart from the fact that it's actually not clear whether there's any substance to it—he didn't really work very hard to get it included in his big tax bill, for example—but my concern in relation to welfare and poverty is the implication that it's a magic wand.

EIR: States are coming to a five-year limit on cash grants for welfare recipients. If the Faith-Based Initiative comes in, and Federal welfare grants end, then money which would normally have come from the Federal government to be funnelled through state institutions to help people survive, will that now go through any church that lines up for the money?

Edelman: But, that's actually too substantive a way to look at it. I think it's more smoke and mirrors, and that what you have here is the rhetoric of a faith-based initiative that is offered as a magic-wand substitute for the substance of an anti-poverty policy. Even if you had a serious faith-based initiative, which I believe this is not, it clearly doesn't substitute for things that you can't accomplish through that set of institutions. You can't get national health coverage through a faith-based initiative. So, I think the Faith-Based Initiative is very cosmetic and, among other things, represents a false promise.

EIR: Is the initiative already acting in that fashion?

Edelman: Well, rhetorically, politically, yes.

EIR: But there's no real substance to it?

Edelman: No, and, as I say, even if it had real substance, it still couldn't possibly do the job.

The second question, on the effects of the five-year limit, is a little more complicated than some of what some people say. At the end of the five years, not everybody who is still on the rolls will have been there for five years. Because, as you know, people go on and off the welfare rolls. Nobody knows exactly. There is the 20% exception; of course, it's up to the individual state whether it wants to use that or not.

EIR: What is the 20% exception?

Edelman: The Federal law says, at the end of five years, the state can continue to have 20% of its caseload, at that time, on—they can continue to receive Federal money for 20% of their caseloads.

EIR: Plus the states can also extend their own money.

Edelman: That's right. And some are. New York is going to do that, I think Illinois is going to do that. So, there are a few who are contemplating that. But, the impact on any given day is not going to be cataclysmic. It isn't good, but it isn't going to be cataclysmic. I'm not sure how widely that's understood.

The issue about the time limit plays out in its seriousness over a period of time, because the more time that passes, the more women will have used up their five years cumulatively, through legitimate stints on welfare, before they've finished raising their children.

EIR: The discussion around the original welfare bill, was that we are in a time of prosperity. But that's not the case any more.

Edelman: Yes, well that's the other thing I would say about the time limits. Hitting, as they are likely to, in a time of recession, that does exacerbate the problem. And just in general, wholly apart from the time limits, or including the time limits, the notion of this whole bill was one that was much more geared to prosperity. To the extent that it would work, it was much more geared to prosperity and really didn't contemplate what would happen in a time of recession.

EIR: Smart thinking!

Edelman: Yes—well, insofar as you could say there was even any thinking! So that's my answer on that, is just not to overplay the significance of the time limits in a narrow sense, even though I think it's bad policy.

The third thing is the debate about reauthorization. I would say, yes, there will be a debate that is serious in some ways. It will not go back to first principles. You will not have a position of the Democrats that says, "Let's start all over again." Because the politics is that the basic framework of the new law is widely accepted. Many Democrats still in Congress voted for it, and have a stake in supporting the idea that in general it's working.

EIR: How is the economic downturn going to affect that?

Edelman: It will help. I mean, I'd rather not have a downturn in the economy, but it will help, in the sense that some people

will say we have to do more to protect people who have lost jobs, who went to work, did everything we asked, but don't qualify for unemployment insurance, and are now essentially out of luck, unless we do something. So that will affect the debate, if there's an economic crisis at the same time.

But, otherwise, what you're going to get is, on the Republican side, you will have a movement to cut the money, and there will be a debate over that.

EIR: To cut Federal grants?

Edelman: In two flavors: both Federal money and the state maintenance of effort. Reauthorizing TANF [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families] but with less money. They'll say, "We cut the rolls in half." For example, Robert Rector goes around saying, "I'm a nice guy, we ought to only cut the funds by 20 or 25%." So, that will be the first thing to fight. This is a welfare-to-work policy, and if we want people to succeed in the workplace, we have to continue to invest in that.

I think Secretary [of Health and Human Services Tommy] Thompson will support that. Whatever else he is, he's always said that he thinks it costs money to help people succeed in getting off welfare. I don't know what the White House would say. I'm not as sure about Secretary Thompson in relation to state maintenance of effort, because he's also a [former] governor [of Wisconsin]. So the money thing comes in two flavors: the Federal money and the maintenance of effort. Second, there's going to be a very big debate about marriage.

EIR: That goes to the Faith-Based Initiative also.

Edelman: Somewhat; it certainly overlaps with it. But, you know that there's going to be a conservative position that wants to tie the receipt of money to marriage. I don't think there will be any significant number of people who will go that far, but you'll certainly see people, from all stripes, whose faiths are very important, and I agree with the general principle that it's very important to have fathers involved in the lives of their kids. That general principle I agree with.

I'm working with some people right now, about how do we get the situation of minority males into the debate. The labor force participation of minority women, African-American single mothers, has gone up. Quite dramatically, actually. And the labor force participation of African-American men has gone down, over the same period of time. So, that's a serious question that I think the people on the progressive side should be raising in the context of this marriage and fatherhood debate. I think what people on the progressive side do not want are policies that smack of coercion.

Then you're going to have a lot of discussions—on the progressive side, people are going to say, we shouldn't be talking just about welfare here. There's a whole bunch of pieces of legislation that interact. So, the debate should be about poverty, and even more than that, about people getting an adequate income from work and the safety net. So that means an act like Kennedy-Snowe, about health coverage for parents.

EIR: What is the Kennedy-Snowe act?

Edelman: Sens. [Edward] Kennedy [D-Mass.] and [Olympia] Snowe [R-Me.] have a bill that would extend health coverage to low-income parents. So, that's a separate bill. And there's a whole series of things. The Earned Income Tax Credit needs to be improved. We need more funding for child care through the child-care legislation.

EIR: So that all back to the state of the economy.

Edelman: Yes, but the debate should not be just about welfare. Within welfare itself, we should be certainly talking about reviving and re-extending aid to legal immigrants, which has still not been fully restored. And there's a whole bunch of things having to do with time limits. You shouldn't be subject to the time limits if you get extra money while you're working. That's ridiculous. But they are. That's Federal law. If a state uses Federal money to help somebody who already has a job, Federal TANF money, it counts against that person's time limits. Time limits shouldn't apply during recessions, either national or local. Time limits shouldn't apply to moms who are staying home taking care of chronically ill, disabled kids, or infirm relatives.

EIR: What about adults who are chronically ill and disabled?

Edelman: That's more complicated. If somebody is disabled, but not legally disabled, how do you handle that under that law? They can't draw disability because they don't quite qualify, but they're still not very effective workers. That's hard to articulate, and maybe the best you can do with that sort of person is to cover them under the 20% exception, but they should raise the 20%.

So, there will be a whole bunch of things about time limits. Then, how do we put some kind of limits on the states that are what I call the outliers, with particularly awful policies? That's hard, but I would say, if you want to have a time limit shorter than five years, you have to have exceptions for people who can't find jobs.

EIR: Yes, or a whole lot more gravediggers.

Edelman: Something like that. And if you want to terminate somebody from the rolls, you've got to have a face-to-face meeting and figure out some kind of a plan for them, if you're not going to give them cash assistance. So, those are the sorts of issues. People will talk about somehow rewarding states that use the policies to reduce poverty, rather than simply to reduce the welfare rolls. Nobody has an exact proposal for that, but that certainly sounds good.

Interview: Joseph M. Neal, Jr.

State Sen. Joseph M. Neal, Jr. (D-N. Las Vegas) is chairman of the Nevada Legislative Black Caucus. He was interviewed by Marianna Wertz, on Sept. 12.

EIR: You recently attended a national conference of the Community Action Agencies, set up in the 1970s under President Johnson's War on Poverty, where Bush's plan to replace these agencies with the Faith-Based Initiative was discussed.

Neal: During the conference, it became obvious to me that, with the statements that President Bush has made himself—that the War on Poverty has “served its usefulness,” and had not done what it was intended to do, and it was a failure—this to me suggested that their aim and purpose seems to be that they want to substitute the Faith-Based Initiative for the War on Poverty program.

EIR: Yes, they pretty much announced that at a conference they had in Washington last week.

Neal: So, that seems to be the direction that I gather that they are tending to take, to destroy the War on Poverty program, and use that money for other things, and put the burden of taking care of the poor upon the faith-based organizations, the churches.

EIR: Are the churches in any capacity to handle the poverty?

Neal: No, they're not. Nothing that you can demand of a church, in terms of helping anybody—it's out of the goodness of the church that they decide to help. In any case, except it's forthcoming from any faith-based organization, their membership comes first. If you happen not to be a part of that church, then you're not going to be getting any help.

EIR: LaRouche has called this “state-run prostitution.”

Neal: Yeah. It could be that, too. I see, without having these organizations to take care of the poor—and these organizations have done a tremendous job in directing resources out to the most needy. As a part of that program, Head Start has been one of the most successful programs of the War on Poverty. They have taken the children at a very early age, and the reports that I've been privileged to see, and people who've talked to me about those reports, indicate that those kids do very well when they get into school. Over many years, those children have been very successful.

In my judgment, to eliminate the War on Poverty, because there seems to be a growing depression in this country, would be very devastating to many who still need the services of those various organizations.

EIR: This comes as welfare recipients in many states will soon run out of their five-year time limit for cash assistance.

Neal: That's true. The five-year limit for welfare is running out, and there seems to be a need to go somewhere for assistance, and something to identify job capabilities or training or housing or whatever. Many of these [agency] programs engage in those particular services. I don't think that you can depend upon the United Way and the Salvation Army—particularly the Salvation Army, which is moving in on the poverty program—to take care of all of these needs across the country.