



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on August 9, 2012

Critics Blast Obama for Gutting 1996 Welfare Reform Law

Republican critics and presumed GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney are slamming President Obama for reversing a landmark welfare reform law instituted in 1996 under the Clinton administration. The 1996 law enacted a number of reforms, including a time limit on how long families could receive aid, a requirement that recipients must eventually find work, and a provision that replaced a federal entitlement with grants to the states.



The debacle underscores the work requirements attached to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the federal assistance program that became welfare in 1996. Currently, the program includes a [series of requirements](#) that address work activities, including on-the-job-training, subsidized or unsubsidized employment, and pursuing high school or GED certification. Further, the reform law mandates that states monitor the hours welfare recipients spend in these work activities, with 50 percent required to participate (or lower if they reduce their caseloads).

The controversy centers on the fact that last month the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued an order providing an exemption to states if they meet certain requirements. Families would still be required to get jobs or at least prepare for employment, but states can now receive waivers from the original standards.

But while the administration touts the effort as an innovative measure to get more families off the welfare rolls, Republican lawmakers and conservative advocates blamed the HHS' move for terminating the program's work requirement. "This is a brazen and unwarranted unraveling of welfare reform," [asserted](#) House Ways and Means Chairman Dave Camp (R-Mich.), who helped draft the 1996 law.

Mr. Romney also joined the fray, blasting the president for eliminating key welfare reform measures. "You wouldn't have to work and wouldn't have to train for a job," stated a new ad by the Romney campaign. "They just send you your welfare check."

Political activist and champion of welfare reform Star Parker also [railed against](#) the waiver, adding that Obama and the White House "really like people enslaved to government dependency." Ms. Parker, who herself had been on welfare for seven years, played a chief role in the 1996 law's passage.

During a recent Conservative Women's Network event at The Heritage Foundation, CNSNews.com asked Parker about the administration's controversial move: "The Obama administration has waived the work requirements in welfare reform. You were obviously a huge champion of that reform in the 90s; what's your initial reaction and what effect will this move have on the program?"

"Well, my initial reaction is — what are they not going to destroy?" Park responded. "We were very successful with the work requirements in welfare reform. The women were successful. We're talking 5 million women and 9 million children whose lives changed because of work requirements. These children, for the first time in their lives, had an opportunity in America to be prosperous because of their mom bringing in more than the welfare would pay."



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However, regardless of how the programs are administered, Parker indicated, the ultimate goal is to curb expansive entitlement programs that are squandering taxpayer dollars and further bloating government deficits.

“[W]hen you promise somebody that you’re going to take care of them from womb to tomb, the end result is larger numbers dependent, which is what’s happening in food stamps and more bankruptcy, if you will, for our government coffers,” she continued. “We’re not going to be able to limit the size and scope of government, reduce that size, if we continue to allow for these out-of-control poverty programs.”

Strangely, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius boasted that the administration eliminated the TANF work requirements to boost employment among welfare recipients. Further, the agency asserts that states receiving a waiver must “commit that their proposals will move at least 20 percent more people from welfare to work compared to the state’s prior performance.”

However, as Heritage’s Amy Payne [indicates](#), given the trends of welfare turnover rates, a quick-fix method for states to meet the requirement will be to boost the number of people on welfare in the first place. “On the surface, [the 20-percent requirement] sounds impressive, but a state can meet this goal merely by raising its monthly employment exits from, say, 5 percent to 6 percent of caseload,” Heritage’s Robert Rector [adds](#). “That kind of change will occur automatically as the economy improves, even without bureaucratic action.”

In effect, the new HHS standard is, according to Rector, merely a ploy by the Obama administration to exempt liberal-leaning states from the traditional TANF participation rates without disclosing its true intent.

Photo: President Bill Clinton signing welfare reform legislation in 1996



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