

## **Statement of Congressman Wally Herger**

### **On H. Con. Res. 438, Expressing the Sense of Congress that continuing welfare reforms must remain a priority**

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of House Resolution 438. This resolution does something we don't do enough of in this institution – it takes a look back at what Congress tried to do in the previous years, and assesses whether we got it right. As the text of the resolution suggests, many people – including some former critics – think we got it right.

Mr. Speaker, the results of the 1996 welfare reform are remarkable in terms of achieving – and in some cases exceeding – the goals the Nation laid out when Congress took on this challenging issue. Former Wisconsin Governor and Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson has called welfare reform one of the most successful social policy changes in U.S. history, and I think he is right. In terms of reducing dependence, promoting work and earnings, and reducing poverty, it would be hard to match the outcomes of these reforms.

I also would like to thank my colleague Clay Shaw for his steadfast leadership and tireless work to enact these remarkable reforms. Welfare reform did not happen over night, and it would not have happened without his strong leadership.

Ten years ago today, this House passed what went on to become the landmark 1996 welfare reform law. At that time, nearly 12 million parents and children were dependent on the government. Today, after ten years of reforms and much success, that number is down to fewer than 5 million individuals dependent on welfare checks for support, a decline of an unprecedented 64 percent, almost two-thirds. Millions of those families now collect a paycheck instead of a welfare check. Since welfare reform was enacted, we have seen a sharp increase in work among welfare recipients. This is a stark contrast to the Nation's former welfare program, under which there was no incentive to work. In fact, the prior program actually punished work. But today because of welfare reform, work among those on welfare has more than doubled. And to support working families, the amount taxpayers provide for child care has tripled, from \$4 billion to nearly \$12 billion today.

Back in 1996, welfare reform opponents argued that if enacted, this law would result in millions of additional children living in poverty. However, they were as wrong with this prediction as they were with all their other predictions about what this law would accomplish. Compared to 1996, 1.4 million fewer children are in poverty today. This is a direct result of the pro-work, pro-family policies passed in 1996 and which are still in place today.

Earlier this year this House, accompanied by the Senate, sent President Bush legislation to extend and strengthen the 1996 reforms to help even more low-income parents go to work. All States are now busy revamping their programs to meet that challenge. Based on the results of the 1996 reforms, we should have great confidence that millions more families will succeed in finding and keeping jobs in the years ahead. That's something every Member, and indeed every American, should support.

Again, I'd like to thank Clay Shaw for all his work in this area, over so many years. I look forward to continuing to work in the years ahead to support all families in their efforts to end their dependence on government assistance.

I urge all my colleagues to support this resolution.

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