



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

<http://finance.senate.gov>

For Immediate Release

Thursday, May 26, 2005

Republican Governors Urge Senate Consideration of Grassley Welfare Bill

WASHINGTON – The Republican Governors Association is urging prompt Senate consideration of the welfare re-authorization bill from Sen. Chuck Grassley, chairman of the Finance Committee. In a May 19 letter, 29 Republican governors encouraged Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist and other Senate leaders to schedule floor consideration as soon as possible.

“I appreciate the position of these governors,” Grassley said. “The welfare program is a federal-state partnership, and the states have been operating their welfare programs under a cloud of uncertainty for too long. We’re facing the tenth extension of the welfare program at the end of June. The delay in updating this program is beginning to undermine the progress we’ve made since the system was overhauled in 1996.

“Governors understand that it’s time for Congress to give clear direction and expanded flexibility to the states and to strengthen the work and family components of the welfare program. Now that the filibuster controversy is behind us, I hope we can move to consider the welfare bill as soon as possible. This legislation has broad bipartisan support, and the Senate shouldn’t delay in acting on such an important bill. ”

On March 9, the Finance Committee approved by voice vote Grassley’s legislation to modify and reauthorize the welfare program for five years. The *Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone*, or PRIDE, bill received the support of the committee’s ranking member, Sen. Max Baucus of Montana.

The text of the Republican Governors Association’s letter follows. Attached is a file showing the signatories.

May 19, 2005

Dear Senators:

In 2002, President Bush outlined a plan for reauthorizing the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) that would increase independence and strengthen families. The President outlined an agenda to advance the historical work led by Republicans in passing the 1996 welfare reform law, and to build on that success. Those key principles included:

Helping more welfare recipients achieve self-sufficiency through work;

Promoting child well-being and strengthening families; and

Empowering states to seek new and innovative solutions to help welfare recipients achieve independence.

Since that time, the House and Senate have considered TANF bills that support these goals, but have not been able to come to agreement on reauthorizing this important legislation. As Governors tasked with the responsibility of implementing welfare to work programs—including the vital family supports that improve the well-being of children and strengthen families—we believe it is critical for Congress to complete work on this five-year reauthorization.

This effort is far too important to leave to the limitations of a reconciliation process. Through the leadership of Chairman Grassley, the Senate Finance Committee reported out a bill on March 9, 2005. We urge you to join your colleagues in ensuring that it is scheduled for Senate floor consideration as soon as possible, and work to make certain the bill will be able to move past any parliamentary roadblocks. TANF is the critical link to every significant state program that stabilizes children and families—providing hope and a future.

Managing TANF through temporary extensions (ninth to date) promotes uncertainty and makes it difficult to effectively administer services and plan efficiently. Stable multi-year funding is essential for our states to build on the successful programs we have developed. As Governors, we believe the following provisions in the Senate bill are integral to state programs, and support their inclusion and protection as the bill moves forward through regular order:

Family initiatives -- The Senate bill supports the continuation and an increase in funding for many programs that were initiated through the flexibility provided in the 1996 welfare law. Abstinence education funding, fatherhood and healthy marriage incentives are all valuable and necessary programs that will help families achieve self-sufficiency.

Funding – We support continued stable funding of the block grant, as well as the essential resources to provide families with adequate child care as they work to attain self-sufficiency. The Senate bill provides states with the ability to maintain and effectively utilize “carry forward” funds, while also protecting the state supplemental funding grants. Additionally, states are given the necessary flexibility to coordinate funding streams to better serve those utilizing the program.

State flexibility -- The Senate bill provides states with the flexibility to manage their TANF programs and effectively serve low-income populations. Increased waiver authority, allowable work activities, availability of partial work credit and the ability to coordinate state programs are all important aspects of moving recipients from welfare to work.

Many elements of the Senate and House bill are consistent with each other, and the goals established by the President. It is time to move this critical reauthorization forward, and settle any differences in conference. We will make ourselves available to answer any questions you may have on state specific issues, and to assist you in anyway possible.

Thank you for your help on this very important matter.

