

Office of the White House Press Secretary
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THE WHITE HOUSE

ADDRESS BY DR. DANIEL P. MOYNIHAN
COUNSELLOR TO THE PRESIDENT
AT THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

I have come to Salt Lake City in response to the cordial invitation of Senator Wallace F. Bennett to speak to the 23rd National Legislation Conference which is meeting here this week. I should have been pleased to do so in any event, but am doubly so in the present circumstances.

We are living in Washington through one of those moments that come every one or two generations when legislation of historic consequence is before the Congress. Not just important legislation, or urgent legislation. Matters of that kind are the day-to-day business of the Congress. They are demanding, even exhausting, but in a sense routine. It is only very rarely, once or at most twice in the career of the average legislator, that an issue comes before the Congress which separates one era of social policy from another.

The Social Security Act of 1935 was such a piece of legislation.

The Family Assistance Act of 1970 will be such a piece of legislation.

The principles of the legislation are simple. As President Nixon stated in his national television address a year ago, this legislation would place a floor under the income of every American family with children. Poverty would cease to be a normal condition of any child's life, anywhere in the United States.

The legislation is aimed at helping the working poor. These are the families that try the hardest in America and somehow get the least. For decades now we have been providing income assistance to everyone save those persons who are most likely to benefit from that little bit of help that makes the difference between deprivation and just enough.

The Family Assistance Program has built into it strong work incentives, so that the more a man earns, the more he keeps. It has training and day care provisions, which in themselves would be legislative enactments of major consequence, but are only part of this monumental event.

For generations Americans have been importing social policy. Most of our legislation, even the most advanced, on examination turns out to consist largely of ideas Lloyd George stole from Bismark. With Family Assistance all that changes. President Nixon has taken the lead not just in the Nation, but in the world.

Surprisingly, the costs of the program are not excessive. At the present rate of growth of the existing welfare program, we would be spending more money on AFDC payments by the mid 1970's than we would be on family assistance.

The key idea behind the President's proposal is that we are moving toward an income strategy in dealing with problems of poverty and disadvantage. We are moving away from a services strategy. We believe that what most families need is a decent income. If they can get that through work and income supplementation, the government should leave them alone to run their own lives.

But we do believe there is a government responsibility, and that this is a national responsibility. The key to the New Federalism is not that power will be decentralized, or centralized or mediocratized, if I am correct in recalling that that is a word for middling. It is rather that we hope to assign government responsibilities to that level of government most suited to carry them out efficiently and effectively. In the case of Family Assistance, we have a national program, with national standards. As the President stated when he announced the program, no child is worth more in one state than in another. That is a principle all Americans should agree upon, but somehow American government has never responded to.

We are responding now. In one of the great legislative events of recent times, Family Assistance not only passed the House of Representatives this Spring, but did so overwhelmingly. It is now before the Senate, specifically in the Senate Finance Committee.

The President has every expectation that the bill will be reported to the floor of the Senate, and as he observed in a meeting we held on this subject yesterday at the Western White House in San Clemente, if the whole of the Senate is given an opportunity to vote on this legislation, there is no question but that they will respond as favorably as did their colleagues in the House.

In this matter the President, of course, relies most heavily on the support and counsel of Senator Wallace F. Bennett, who is the second ranking Republican member of the Finance Committee. Senator Bennett is one of the sponsors of the President's legislation, and one of the most learned men concerning this enormously, and at times discouragingly complex subject. If Family Assistance succeeds, the people of Utah will not have to look far to find one of the men who will have made it possible.

It happens that this is the most pressing matter before the Senate at this moment, but it would be a rare moment indeed for a visitor from Washington to arrive in Salt Lake City and not be able to report that some matter of national consequence -- one thinks immediately of health care issues -- is at issue in the capital and that in one way or another Wallace F. Bennett is involved in deciding the outcome. It is perhaps one of his qualities that he does not always advertise this fact.

It has been said of Washington that it is a city where there is almost nothing a determined and intelligent, and principled person cannot achieve -- if he is willing to see other men get the credit. It is a truthful saying, and likely to remain such. Still, there are occasions when that fact ought to be acknowledged, and I would hope my brief visit to Utah might be taken as an indication that the President and his Administration have not failed to note the process at work in the person of the Senior Senator from the State of Utah.