

Morning Bell: Obama's Imperial Presidency Guts Welfare Reform

Posted By [Amy Payne](#) On July 13, 2012 @ 9:14 am In [Ongoing Priorities](#) | [Comments Disabled](#)

The [imperial Presidency](#) ^[1] has overturned Congress and the law again. Not content to stop at rewriting immigration policy, education policy and energy policy, yesterday, President Obama's Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released an official policy directive rewriting the welfare reform law of 1996. The new policy [guts the federal work requirements](#) ^[2] that were the foundation of the Clinton-era reform.

While this real news occurred yesterday, most of the media remained fixated on political ads and speeches, letting a major and unilateral shift in America's welfare system go nearly unreported.

Welfare reform replaced the old Aid to Families with Dependent Children with a new program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The Heritage Foundation played a pivotal role in building bipartisan consensus for the reform and providing many of the recommendations that became part of the law. The whole point was that able-bodied adults should be required to work or prepare for work as a condition of receiving welfare aid.

[This reform was very successful.](#) ^[3] TANF became the only welfare program (out of more than 70) that promoted greater self-reliance. It moved 2.8 million families off the welfare rolls and into jobs so that they were providing for themselves. Child poverty fell, and single-parent employment rose. Recipients were required to perform at least 20–30 hours per week of work or job preparation activities in exchange for the cash benefit.

Now, Obama's HHS is claiming that it can waive those work requirements that are at the heart of the law, and without Congress's consent.

When it established TANF, Congress deliberately exempted or shielded nearly all of the TANF program from waiver authority. They explicitly did not want the law to be rewritten at the whim of HHS bureaucrats. In a December 2001, the non-partisan Congressional Research Service clarified that there was no authority to override work and other major requirements: ["Effectively, there are no TANF waivers"](#) ^[2], it reported.

But that did not stop the Obama Administration, which has been increasing welfare spending at an alarming rate already. President Obama has [added millions to the welfare rolls](#) ^[4], and his Administration has come under fire lately for its efforts to expand and add more Americans to the food stamp program.

This is a chronic problem: Over the past two decades, welfare spending has grown more rapidly than Social Security and Medicare, education, and defense. The TANF reform was one small step in the direction of reducing Americans' dependence on government programs and getting them back on their feet. Cutting its work component is likely to unnecessarily swell the ranks of welfare recipients and with no way to pay for it.

Heritage experts Robert Rector and Kiki Bradley explained further in their [comprehensive analysis of yesterday's announcement](#) ^[5]:

In the past, state bureaucrats have attempted to define activities such as hula dancing, attending Weight Watchers, and bed rest as "work." These dodges were blocked by the federal work standards. Now that the Obama Administration has abolished those standards, we can expect "work" in the TANF program to mean anything but work. The new welfare dictate issued by the Obama Administration clearly guts the law.

Obama certainly didn't tell people he was going to gut welfare reform when he was running for President in 2008—and why would he? "Welfare horror stories helped elect Ronald Reagan," [wrote](#) ^[6] Mickey Kaus of The Daily Caller. "A promise to 'end welfare as we know it' elected President Clinton...And in 2008, Barack Obama didn't dare suggest that he wanted to do what he has done today."

While the 1996 welfare reform successfully moved people from welfare into work, it did not "end welfare as we know it." Now, however, the Obama Administration has ended welfare reform as we know it. The President cannot hide his disastrous unemployment record by depriving Americans of the hope of a job. He should immediately reverse this course, and offer constructive ideas for economic growth rather than government dependence.

[Fact Sheet on Welfare Reform](#) ^[7]

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- [3] This reform was very successful.: <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2003/02/the-continuing-good-news>
- [4] added millions to the welfare rolls: <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2010/06/confronting-the-unsustainable-growth-of-welfare-entitlements-principles-of-reform-and-the-next-steps?query=Confronting+the+Unsustainable+Growth+of+Welfare+Entitlements:+Principles+of+Reform+and+the+Next+Steps>
- [5] comprehensive analysis of yesterday's announcement: <http://blog.heritage.org/2012/07/12/obama-guts-welfare-reform/>
- [6] wrote: <http://dailycaller.com/2012/07/13/will-obama-get-away-with-it/#ixzz20UzC44br>
- [7] Fact Sheet on Welfare Reform: <http://www.heritage.org/research/factsheets/2011/03/welfare-reform-the-next-steps>
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- [9] reports: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/14/world/middleeast/massacre-reported-in-syria-as-security-council-meets.html?pagewanted=all>
- [10] shadow campaign: <http://news.yahoo.com/d-c-corruption-calls-mount-mayor-vincent-gray-181512370.html>
- [11] tell a story to the American people: http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/obama-my-biggest-mistake-was-not-telling-story_648482.html
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