

WINTER 2006

Vision & Voices

NEVADA WOMEN'S LOBBY A VOICE FOR WOMEN AND FAMILIES
 The Organization Dealing with Issues Concerning Women, Children and Families

IN DEFENSE OF SUCCESS

Federal safety net programs work and are needed, but Congress plans to cut their funding significantly. E.J. Dionne complains in his article, *In Defense of Success: Government Really Can Lessen Poverty*, in the July 19 Washington Post, that liberals rarely talk about what their programs have actually achieved and that some on the left worry that saying certain things are working is a form of selling out because it distracts attention from all that is wrong. He says the new studies by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (available at www.cbpp.org), show that programs aimed at lifting up Americans with low incomes actually do what they say they do, and he points to a growing recognition on the part of progressives that after years of playing defense against conservative claims, it is time to go on offense. Excerpts from Dionne's article follow.

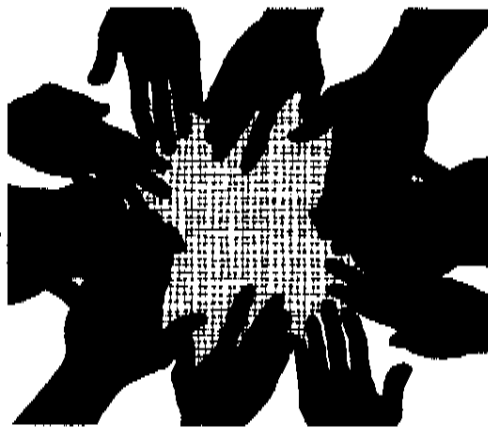
"The fact is that every year 27 million Americans are lifted from poverty by our system of public benefits. More than 80 million Americans receive health insurance through a government program—Medicaid, Medicare or the State Children's Health Insurance Program, known as SCHIP. Without these programs, tens of millions would be unable to afford access to medical care. As the Center notes, government programs reduce both the extent and the depth of poverty.

"Does all this cost a fortune? Not by any fair reckoning. Federal spending on Medicaid and SCHIP represents 1.5 percent of gross domestic product. Federal financing for the rest of the low-income programs consumes just 2.3 percent of GDP. For a sense of comparison, consider that defense spending consumes 4 percent of GDP and interest on the national debt gobbles up 1.5 percent. President Bush's tax cuts — which go in large part to the wealthiest Americans — will consume roughly 2 percent of GDP.

"And federal spending for the poor does a huge amount of good. Food stamps, the Center notes, "help more than 25 million people with low incomes

afford an adequate diet." The school lunch and breakfast programs provide free and reduced-price meals to 22 million school children from low-income families. The supplemental nutrition program for women, infants and children known as WIC helps about 8 million pregnant and postpartum women and their children under 5. One of its effects has been to reduce the incidence of low birth weight among infants. Think of WIC as one of our most important pro-life programs.

"Or take the earned-income tax credit, which supplements the incomes of the working poor. Census data show that in 2002 the EITC "lifted 4.9 million people out of poverty, including 2.7 million children." Without the EITC," the center notes, "the poverty rate among children would have been nearly one-third higher."



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NEVADA'S SAFETY NET

The number of Nevadans living below the poverty level has increased steadily since 1990. Factors such as low child support enforcement, jobs that pay less than living wage, failure of employers to offer health insurance, and lack of affordable housing create a need for safety net services provided by the government.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, food stamps, and housing subsidies are some of the most necessary programs provided by state and federal agencies for poor families. Nevada has always had inadequate TANF grants (formerly Aid to Dependent Children). The maximum monthly TANF grant for a family of three has been \$348 since 1992. A combination of state and federal dollars fund Medicaid and Nevada CheckUp, which provide health care to the poor and to children of the working poor.

Recent cuts in federal funding will have a drastic impact on the lives of poor families in Nevada. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities said "The House budget cutting bill would ask low income families to shoulder a large share of the budget-cutting burden, leaving them with less access to health care and basic food aid. In addition, children would receive less

of the child support payments they are owed" (See *Federal Cuts* on page 2.)

Cuts targeting children, child support enforcement and foster care case management funds will put those children at risk. Nevada's share of the burden in caring for the poor, the elderly and the disabled will expand with the proposed cuts. This is sure to be reflected in the 2007 state budget to be considered by Nevada's legislature.

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Dionne concludes, "Washington's silent scandal is that the weak claims of the best-off and the best-connected are getting far more deference than the needs of weak clients. When we know the good that federal spending for the poor can do, this silent scandal might begin to command a share of our attention."

NEVADA'S CHILDCARE

For many families, childcare is a critical safety net. Families receiving TANF grants must meet strict work requirements and need affordable childcare to enable them to train for and obtain jobs. In addition, good quality childcare can work to end the cycle of poverty in a family. As children enter elementary school, those who have been in high quality childcare settings will have higher academic skills, greater language development, more positive social interactions with peers and reduced behavior problems in school. (*The Nevada Women's Agenda 2005*)

Childcare subsidies are available through Children's Cabinet (Reno) and Economic Opportunity Board (Las Vegas). As federal funds are cut, will the state of Nevada fill the gap to enable poor families to keep their children in safe and adequate childcare facilities?

State funds for training and compensation of teachers are also needed to recruit and retain quality pre-school teachers. Only 18 occupations out of 770 surveyed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics had lower mean wages than childcare workers. Those who earned higher wages included service station attendants, bicycle repairers and locker room attendants.

In Nevada there is a shortage of affordable quality childcare and little available during nights and weekends when many people work around the clock. It is time for the state to invest in early childhood education and the next generation of Nevada workers.

AGENDA BOOK 2005

You can get more information about current programs, gaps in services and how Nevada can do better, in *The Nevada Women's Agenda 2005* at nevadawomenslobby.org/issues.htm, or email NVWL@aol.com for copies.

FEDERAL CUTS – WHAT'S AT STAKE?

U.S. House/Senate cuts being considered now, which will impact Nevada services (details at cbpp.org):

- **Medicaid** – reductions in benefits, new premiums and increases in co-payments
- **TANF (Welfare)** – stiffer work requirements and more paperwork; neither funded
- **Childcare** – heavily under-funded; fewer children covered
- **Child Support and Enforcement** – major reductions in funds for enforcement
- **SSI Payments** – Long payment delays for low-income individuals with disabilities
- **Foster Care** – Less help for relatives raising children; case management cuts
- **Food Stamps** – Cuts here are off the table!

Please ask your U.S. Senators and Representative to help minimize cuts to services (mention your favorites). Switchboard: (202)224-3121

SENIOR SAFETY NET

Nevada seniors will be hit hard by federal cuts, especially those whose health care, nursing home care and drugs have been paid by Medicaid and who may be facing premiums, increasing co-payments and reduced benefits.

With health care, subsidized housing and other assistance needs growing with age, federal cuts and subsequent state and county cutbacks could send low income seniors back to earlier days of hardship and deferral of important health care and nutrition.

Some other important senior services subsidized with state, county or private funds include nutrition programs, housing, transportation, daycare, utility and weatherization help, rent and property tax rebates, legal assistance, and elder protective services.

A new one-stop shop, Nevada Care Connection, will help Nevada's elderly get the information and referrals they need, but options will be diminishing if proposed cuts are made.

TASC - THREAT TO NEVADA

Future growth in Nevada expenditures could be limited to annual changes in population plus inflation under TASC (Tax and Spend Control), a ballot initiative soon to be circulated for signatures in Nevada. Any further growth would need voter approval. This constitutional amendment is modeled on the TABOR initiative passed in Colorado and being proposed in several states. (See cbpp.org for more detail and for the disturbing impact of TABOR on Colorado's education and social services.)

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), these limits "undermine existing services for children, youth, and families and make any new initiatives virtually impossible to undertake."

NWL believes that TASC is a severe threat to current safety net programs. The impact of federal cuts now being decided in Congress on Nevada's services must also be evaluated before dangerous limitations are set.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

David Morton of the Reno Housing Authority sees a critical shortage of housing resources in Nevada for special needs populations. Both construction funds and subsidies targeting special populations are lacking, and the meteoric rise in housing costs makes it almost impossible to build new affordable housing.

According to Morton, both the poor and working poor feel the effects of these problems, as do such special populations as released prisoners, victims of domestic violence, and recovering substance abusers, all of whose numbers are rising as the population grows.

Nevada receives federal funding for affordable housing plus funds from Nevada's real estate transfer tax, but much of available resources go for rehabilitation and refinancing rather than new construction. Morton would like to see more funding commitment from the state, and more non-profit groups and businesses involved in affordable housing. The Silver Sky project in Las Vegas is an example of a public/private partnership providing affordable senior housing on donated BLM land, with federal, state and local resources.

• *A minimum-wage worker would need to work 106 hours weekly to rent the average one-bedroom apartment in Nevada - National Low Income Housing Coalition.* •

WOMEN AND GIRLS - STATUS IN NEVADA

The Nevada Women's Fund has released *The Status of Women and Girls in Nevada*, a comprehensive report developed to provide the data needed to identify and eliminate barriers facing Nevada women and girls and aid in decision making. Some Nevada facts reported:

- 20.5% of women with no husband present live in poverty (36.5% if they have children under 5), and 7.5% of all families live in poverty
- Only 47% of child support due in 2004 was distributed
- The rate of suicide among Nevada women is the highest in the country
- 40.6% of low-income women (and 18.5% of all women) have no health insurance
- Females graduate from high school at higher rates than males and outnumber them on college campuses
- Women earn relatively low wages and hold low percentages of professional and managerial positions while Nevada's economy is strong, with low unemployment and poverty
- Women's pay is 81% of men's, higher than the 75% national percentage, mostly because Nevada men earn \$3000 less than the U.S. median
- The percentage of Nevada women who begin prenatal care in the first trimester of pregnancy is 50th in the nation
- Nevada is now more diverse racially than the rest of the country
- 48% of women voted in 2000 (compared to 56% nationwide)

For more information contact the Nevada Women's Fund, (775)786-2335.

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"It's hard to imagine that things can get worse in a state that is already ranked dead last in Medicaid spending, but the latest Census numbers say that one in five Nevadans have no health insurance at all" - Jennifer Benedict, Great Basin Primary Care Association.

* * *

... "state revenues would have to grow by more than 9 percent per year between now and 2008 in order to generate enough funds simply to restore the level of services that prevailed in fiscal year 2000, before the recession." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 12/05

SUMMIT ON THE STATES

NWL steering committee member Pat Elzy participated in a national policy conference in Washington, D.C. in December with over 200 state legislators, advocates, and activists across the nation. The annual *Summit on the States*, sponsored by the Center for Policy Alternatives, is the nation's only nonpartisan organization formed to strengthen the capacity of state legislators to lead and achieve progressive change.

Pat joined state leaders, legislators, grassroots advocates, and national experts in workshops touching on a wide range of state issues—juvenile justice reform, reproductive health, election reform, micro enterprise development, reforming public education, preventing identity theft, promoting energy efficiency, increasing minimum wage, and more.

The *Summit* also launched this year's *Progressive Agenda*, a handbook for legislators covering fifty crucial state issues, and including over fifty pieces of model legislation on health, education, housing, criminal justice, taxation, and the environment (available at cfpa.org).

With the federal government in a conservative stranglehold, the hope for progressive policy is in the states.

"The *Summit* provided policy tools and leadership skills that will help NWL address some of the issues Nevada will be facing," said Elzy. "This was an exciting opportunity to network with progressives across the nation."

NWL HAS STREAMLINED

At our annual NWL Fall Retreat, our main objective was to streamline our structure and become a more cohesive organization. Our old structure was rooted in a regional concept with two separate steering committees (north and south) plus a statewide board, and each entity had its own officers and bank accounts. When NWL was formed in 1988, this seemed a reasonable approach to deal with the vast distances between the major population centers and the many sparsely populated rural areas. But this meant duplicate functions for steering committee members in the north and south as well as a challenge to make sure the two committees were communicating effectively.

We are now the Nevada Women's Lobby, a statewide organization with one treasury, one steering committee and one purpose: to lobby the legislature on the issues that improve the lives of women and families in Nevada. Northern and southern steering committee members meet together using telephone conference calls and e-mail. (We also hope to include members from the rurals.) We will continue to keep our membership informed and involved in our goal of improving the lives of women and families in Nevada.

As you pay your NWL dues for 2006, know that, wherever you live in Nevada, you are working to serve all the women and families of Nevada by supporting a statewide organization.

COALITION TO PROTECT REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

NWL has joined the statewide Coalition to Protect Reproductive Freedom (CPRR), composed of organizations and individuals that believe reproductive rights are being threatened by government interference in private lives. The intent is to educate the public about the importance of these rights, as well as to raise awareness of the impact of policies on reproductive freedom.

Though the 1991 Question 7 ballot measure, which upholds a woman's right to choice in Nevada, was passed by a vast majority of Nevada voters, efforts to erode *Roe vs. Wade* at a national level could impact Nevada's policy. Other threats to reproductive freedom include pharmaceutical access, notification issues, and lack of trained medical personnel.

CPRR's December testimony before the Nevada State Board of Pharmacy emphasized that pharmacies must fill all prescriptions in a timely manner. In the end the board took no position, indicating this should be left to the legislature.

According to Diana Glomb Rogan, acting chair, CPRR's intent is to remain ready to activate when and where opportunities arise to call attention to this most important and fundamental right—the right to individual liberty and privacy. CPRR will next address protection of women's rights and reproductive rights in relation to the Alito nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court.

CALENDAR

- **January 21, 11 am - 1 pm, Nevada Women and the Media.** AAUW Reno, \$20 with lunch, Austin's Restaurant, Reno. (775)720-9582
- **January 21, 9:30 am, "Crisis in Education,"** League of Women Voters, details and reservations www.lwlasvegasvalley.org/voter.htm
- **February Date TBA, "The Abortion Diaries,"** film and panel, Coalition to Protect Reproductive Rights, Las Vegas. (702)932-4041
- **January 25, 2 pm, Welfare Hearings: Providing Welfare to Immigrant Women Who Are Victims of Domestic Violence; Child Support Enforcement Changes.** Carson City, Las Vegas, Reno, Elko (teleconferenced), agenda at <http://welfare.state.nv.us/mairv/PublicWorkshopAgenda012506.pdf>
- **March 11, 6 pm, "To the Roasting of Rory Reid."** Nevada Partnership for Homeless Youth, Henderson, \$400, (702)313-0218
- **April 21-23, State Convention, American Association of University Women,** Reno, (775)826-9494
- **May 10-12, Access to Care Symposium,** Great Basin Primary Care Association, South Lake Tahoe, (775)887-0417 X 101

NWL CONTACTS

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BECOME A 2006 MEMBER

Will you join the NWL's growing network of individuals and organizations committed to lobbying our state legislature on behalf of Nevada's women and families? With so much corporate money infused into our legislative process, it is vital that grassroots organizations like NWL are at the table speaking for the people of Nevada. Please become a member. ⇄

NWL Principles of Unity

Nevada Women's Lobby is a voice for women and children. We are dedicated to equity, non-violence and reproductive choice.

The lives of all people are inherently valuable and worthy of respect and dignity; therefore, we actively work to remove barriers of race, class, age, gender, religion, physical ability and sexual orientation.

Beginning with our own actions and language, we promote non-violence in all aspects of personal, economic and organizational relationships.

We support every women's right to reproductive choice and self-determination

**2006 Membership
Nevada Women's Lobby**

P.O. Box 5565
Reno, NV 89513

NWL is a statewide organization

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 Dues:
 Individual \$40
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NWL dues & donations are not tax deductible.



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