

POVERTY: THE UNFINISHED SOCIAL AGENDA

PRESENTED TO THE
76TH ANNUAL CONNECTICUT SOCIAL WELFARE CONFERENCE

SPONSORED BY THE
CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION FOR HUMAN SERVICES

REMARKS BY
WILLIAM S. WOODSIDE
CHAIRMAN
AMERICAN CAN COMPANY

SHERATON HOTEL
WATERBURY, CT
OCTOBER 1, 1986

CAHS

IN THINKING ABOUT MY SPEECH TO YOU TODAY, I
WAS REMINDED OF A CARTOON I SAW ALMOST ONE
YEAR AGO, ON THE EVE OF THE REAGAN-GORBACHOV
SUMMIT MEETING. IN THIS CARTOON THE TWO WORLD
LEADERS WERE SHOWN STANDING AT EDGES OF
OPPOSITE CLIFFS WHICH SPANNED A VERY WIDE AND
DEEP CHASM. THE DRAWING ITSELF HAD THREE
PANELS.

IN THE FIRST, PRESIDENT REAGAN SHOUTS TO
SECRETARY GORBACHOV, "MR. SECRETARY, FOR THE
SAKE OF ALL HUMANITY IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE
WORK MORE CLOSELY TOGETHER."

CAHS

IN THE SECOND, MR. GORBACHOV RESPONDS BY
YELLING ACROSS THE CHASM, "ABSOLUTELY, MR.
PRESIDENT, I CAN THINK OF NOTHING MORE
IMPORTANT."

IN THE THIRD PANEL, WE SEE MR. REAGAN PEERING
DOWN INTO THAT DEEP ENORMOUS GULF THAT SEPARATES
THE TWO MEN, AND THEN LOOKING UP, HE REPLIES,
"MR. SECRETARY, I THINK YOU SHOULD TAKE THE
FIRST STEP."

CAHS

IN SHARING THIS LITTLE STORY WITH YOU, MY
POINT IS NOT TO SAY THAT A GULF EXISTS BETWEEN
YOU AND ME BECAUSE I DON'T THINK THERE IS,
RATHER, PERHAPS, IT IS A SHORTHANDED REMINDER
THAT THERE IS A PERCEIVED AND, TO SOME EXTENT
A REAL GULF THAT SEPARATES THE VIEW OF OUR
WORLD AS SEEN FROM INSIDE THE OFFICE OF A
NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION AND FROM INSIDE THE
CORPORATE EXECUTIVE SUITE.

REAL OR PERCEIVED THAT GULF MUST BE BRIDGED.

CAHS

IN THAT RESPECT THEN, YOUR INVITATION TO ME IS
A SYMBOLIC REMINDER THAT WE ARE MORE THAN JUST
A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY; WE ARE AN INTERDEPENDENT
SOCIETY. IT IS A REMINDER THAT NO SOCIETY,
REGARDLESS OF HOW STRONG OR SECURE IT FEELS AT
A GIVEN MOMENT, CAN FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY IF
ITS MAJOR INSTITUTIONS, INCLUDING CORPORATIONS
AND SOCIAL WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS, FAIL TO
DEFINE AND PURSUE THE GOALS THEY SHOULD HAVE
IN COMMON.

CAHS

SO I THANK YOU FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE
SOME THOUGHTS WITH YOU THIS AFTERNOON, AND I
THANK YOU FOR PLACING ME IN THE HIGHLY
DISTINGUISHED COMPANY OF YOUR PAST KEYNOTE
SPEAKERS: MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN, MAGGIE
KUHNS, JULIAN BOND AND ROBERT HEILBRONER.

THIS IS A SPECIAL OCCASION FOR ME IN OTHER
WAYS AS WELL.

CAHS

IT IS SPECIAL BECAUSE THE CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION FOR HUMAN SERVICES IS A GRANTEE -- INDEED, A VERY GOOD GRANTEE -- OF THE AMERICAN CAN COMPANY FOUNDATION. FOR THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF, THROUGH THE COMMUNITY CHILDHOOD HUNGER IDENTIFICATION PROJECT, CAHS HAS BEEN DEVELOPING A LOW-COST METHODOLOGY THAT WILL ALLOW COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS TO RELIABLY MEASURE THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF HUNGER IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS.

CAHS

AND IT IS SPECIAL BECAUSE OF YOUR CONTINUING
COMMITMENT TO PLACING THE PROBLEMS OF POVERTY
OF THE CONSCIENCE OF EVERY PERSON IN THE
STATE OF CONNECTICUT. THE STUDY, "GROWING UP
AT RISK IN CONNECTICUT", WHICH THE ASSOCIATION
DID IN COLLABORATION WITH THE JUNIOR LEAGUE OF
HARTFORD, IS A VERY SPECIAL DOCUMENT. IT
OFFERS THE MOST VIVID PORTRAIT OF POVERTY'S
IMPACT WITHIN A SINGLE STATE THAT I HAVE EVER
SEEN.

THE DATA PRESENTED IN GROWING UP AT RISK LAYS
OUT SOME STARTLING INFORMATION FOR ALL OF US
TO SEE, WE ALL KNEW CONNECTICUT WAS AN
AFFLUENT STATE, BUT I THINK WE WERE SHOCKED
TO LEARN THAT HARTFORD WAS THE FOURTH POOREST
CITY IN THE COUNTRY, THAT NEW HAVEN WAS THE
SEVENTH POOREST, AND THAT THE POVERTY LEVEL
AMONG CONNECTICUT CHILDREN INCREASED 58
PERCENT IN A SINGLE DECADE.

CAHS

WHAT YOU HAVE DOCUMENTED ON A STATE LEVEL IS
PRECISELY WHAT WE ARE SEEING THROUGHOUT THE
NATION AS A WHOLE: NOT JUST POCKETS OF
POVERTY IN THE MIDST OF AFFLUENCE; BUT POCKETS
OF POVERTY THAT ARE SEEMINGLY IMPERVIOUS TO
ECONOMIC GROWTH.

CAHS

YES, THE NATIONAL POVERTY RATE DID DECLINE
SLIGHTLY BETWEEN 1984 AND 1985. AND YES, THE
BIGGEST DECLINE -- 1.6 PERCENT -- DID OCCUR IN
THE NORTHEAST. BUT WHAT THE RECENT CENSUS
BUREAU REPORT ON POVERTY DOES NOT DIRECTLY
STATE IS THAT EVEN THOUGH WE ARE NOW THREE
YEARS INTO AN ECONOMIC RECOVERY, OUR POVERTY
RATE IS A FULL PERCENTAGE POINT HIGHER THAN
WHEN THE RECOVERY BEGAN. IN OTHER WORDS, THE
NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES ARE RELATIVELY
UNAFFECTED BY ECONOMIC PROGRESS IS INCREASING.

CAHS

IN THAT SENSE, CONNECTICUT IS A MICROCOSM OF
THE NATION. DESPITE YEAR-TO-YEAR SHIFTS IN
THE POVERTY LEVEL, THE BASIC BEDROCK OF
POVERTY HAS INCREASED. WE HAVE REACHED A NEW
PLATEAU OF POVERTY. AND, SADLY, INSTEAD OF BEING
LOWER, IT IS HIGHER.

CAHS

IF THIS TREND IS ALLOWED TO CONTINUE, WE RUN
THE RISK OF BECOMING A SOCIETY WITH A PERMANENT
AND GROWING UNDERCLASS, A SOCIETY IN WHICH
INCREASING NUMBERS OF PEOPLE HAVE NO ROLE, AND
WITH WHICH THEY FEEL NO IDENTITY OR CONNECTION,
A SOCIETY IN WHICH IT WILL BE INCREASINGLY
DIFFICULT FOR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND
PROCESSES TO FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY.

IN MY OPINION, THAT'S THE MOST CRITICAL ISSUE
FACING OUR NATION AND OUR STATE TODAY AND AN
ISSUE NONE OF US CAN AFFORD TO IGNORE ANY
LONGER.

CAHS

TWENTY YEARS AGO, WHEN THE PROGRAMS OF THE
GREAT SOCIETY WERE LAUNCHED, THE ISSUE OF
POVERTY WAS ON EVERYONE'S MIND. TODAY,
HOWEVER, OUR GOVERNMENT SEEMS TO HAVE LOST
SIGHT OF AMERICA'S POOR PEOPLE AND OF THOSE
INSTITUTIONS DIRECTLY CONCERNED WITH POVERTY.

FRANKLY, I MISS THOSE DAYS. THE GREAT SOCIETY
HAD ITS PROBLEMS, BUT IT ALSO PRODUCED MORE
THAN ITS SHARE OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS. THERE
WAS HEAD START, THE JOB CORPS, NEIGHBORHOOD
HEALTH CENTERS, LEGAL SERVICES, FEDERAL
EDUCATION AID TO DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN. IN
ADDITION, A CADRE OF LEADERS AND ADVOCATES OF
THE RIGHTS OF THE POOR GREW OUT OF OUR
EXPERIENCE WITH THE COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM.

CAHS

THOSE WERE ALSO THE YEARS WHEN THIS COUNTRY
PASSED THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964 AND THE
VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965. BOTH LAWS WERE
CONTROVERSIAL, BUT THEY PRODUCED FUNDAMENTAL
AND LONG OVERDUE GAINS IN THIS COUNTRY. I
HATE TO THINK OF WHERE WE WOULD BE WITHOUT
THEM.

BUT WHAT STANDS OUT THE MOST FROM THE GREAT
SOCIETY YEARS IS THE FACT THAT IT WAS A TIME
OF VISION AND COMPASSION IN THIS COUNTRY. IT
WAS A TIME WHEN THIS NATION CARED ABOUT WHAT
KIND OF SOCIETY WE WERE AND WHAT KIND OF
SOCIETY WE WOULD BECOME. IT WAS A TIME WHEN
WE DEBATED, IN A POSITIVE SENSE, THE VALUES WE
WANTED TO REPRESENT AS A SOCIETY, WHEN WE
COULD ARGUE -- WITH STUNNING SIMPLICITY AND
ACCURACY -- THAT IT WAS JUST PLAIN WRONG FOR
CHILDREN TO GROW UP IN POVERTY. PERIOD.

CAHS

THE AMERICA OF 1986, BY CONTRAST, IS A COUNTRY
THAT ON THE WHOLE SEEMS PRETTY WELL SATISFIED
WITH ITSELF. CONNECTICUT IS NO EXCEPTION.
MORE OF US ARE IN GOOD FINANCIAL SHAPE. MORE
OF US HAVE MORE LUXURIES AND LEISURE TIME THAN
WE EVER EXPECTED TO HAVE. AND WE WANT TO
PROTECT AND MAINTAIN ALL THAT WE HAVE
ACCUMULATED.

CAHS

IN ONE SENSE, THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH
THAT. AFTER MANY YEARS OF TURMOIL AND
CHANGE -- BOTH DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL --
AMERICANS CHOSE TO TURN INWARD FOR A TIME,

BUT WE NOW NEED TO REDISCOVER THE SOCIAL
VISION WE HAD IN THE PAST. WE NEED TO
REDEVELOP A CONSENSUS BASED ON COMPASSION FOR
OTHERS, THAT LOOKS BEYOND OUR PERSONAL
WELL-BEING TO THE WELL-BEING OF THE LARGER
COMMUNITY AND THOSE WHO ARE CAUGHT IN THE GRIP
OF POVERTY,

I BELIEVE WE CAN REAWAKEN THAT SENSE OF CARING
AND COMPASSION. BUT WE CANNOT TRANSLATE
COMPASSION INTO RESULTS WITHOUT DEALING MORE
REALISTICALLY AND MORE DIRECTLY WITH POVERTY;
NOT BY TRYING TO RECREATE THE GREAT SOCIETY
BUT BY DEVELOPING POLICIES AND PROGRAMS THAT
ARE APPROPRIATE FOR THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES.

I WOULD RECOMMEND, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT WE FOCUS
BOTH OUR NATIONAL AND STATE EFFORTS ON TWO
POPULATION GROUPS WHOSE NEEDS ARE IMMEDIATE
AND WHERE CLEAR POLICY CHOICES ARE AVAILABLE
TO US: THE WORKING POOR AND CHILDREN.

FOR THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, THE LEADERSHIP OF
BOTH POLITICAL PARTIES IN THIS COUNTRY HAS
PROCLAIMED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORK ETHIC
AND OF PRESERVING FAMILY LIFE. THESE ARE THE
VALUES ALL OF US SAY WE CHERISH AND WANT TO
ENCOURAGE.

THE WORKING POOR TRY VERY HARD TO MAINTAIN
THESE VALUES, THE ODDS, HOWEVER, ARE STACKED
AGAINST THEM.

THE MAJORITY OF THE WORKING POOR WORK AT JOBS AT THE LOW END OF THE WAGE SCALE. THEIR ALREADY LOW WAGES ARE FALLING EVEN FURTHER BEHIND WAGES IN GENERAL. MANY CANNOT FIND FULL-TIME WORK AND MUST SETTLE FOR PART-TIME WORK. EVEN FULL-TIME WORKERS PAID AT THE MINIMUM WAGE DON'T ESCAPE POVERTY. IN FACT, THE INCOME OF A FOUR-PERSON FAMILY IN WHICH THE BREADWINNER WORKS FULL-TIME AT A MINIMUM WAGE JOB IS \$4,400 A YEAR BELOW THE POVERTY LINE.

THERE ALSO ARE AN INCREASING NUMBER OF PEOPLE
LOSING THEIR JOBS FOR STRUCTURAL REASONS AS
OUR ECONOMY SHIFTS FROM MANUFACTURING TO
SERVICES, FROM BLUE COLLAR TO WHITE COLLAR.
OTHER JOBS ARE LOST BECAUSE OF UNPREDICTABLE
ECONOMIC CHANGES WHICH SUDDENLY LEAVE SECTORS
OR REGIONS VULNERABLE TO UNEMPLOYMENT OR
UNDEREMPLOYMENT.

ADD IT ALL UP AND WE FIND THAT THE
NUMBER OF WORKING POOR IN THIS COUNTRY HAS
INCREASED MORE THAN 60 PERCENT IN THE LAST
EIGHT YEARS AND NOW TOTALS MORE THAN SEVEN
MILLION PEOPLE.

CAHS

PARADOXICALLY, THESE ARE THE VERY PEOPLE WE
HAVE BEEN PENALIZING THE MOST. THE BULK OF
CUTS IN MEANS-TESTED FEDERAL ASSISTANCE
PROGRAMS HAS HIT HARDEST AT FAMILIES IN THE
\$5,000 TO \$12,000 A YEAR INCOME RANGE, PRECISELY
THE INCOME RANGE IN WHICH THE WORKING POOR ARE
FOUND.

THE NEW TAX REFORM BILL SHOULD PROVIDE MAJOR
HELP IN THIS AREA. BY REMOVING MILLIONS OF
LOW-INCOME PEOPLE FROM THE INCOME TAX ROLLS,
TAX REFORM OFFERS US THE BEST CHANCE IN AT
LEAST A DECADE TO PROVIDE SIGNIFICANT
ASSISTANCE TO PEOPLE TRYING TO WORK THEIR WAY
OUT OF POVERTY.

THERE IS MORE THOUGH, THAT WE COULD DO FOR THE
WORKING POOR. WE COULD IMPROVE THE EARNED
INCOME TAX CREDIT, RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE,
PROVIDE BETTER DAY CARE AND HEALTH INSURANCE
PROGRAMS AND DEVELOP PROGRAMS THAT UPGRADE
WORK SKILLS TO MEET FUTURE JOB REQUIREMENTS.

CAHS

AGAIN, THE NEW TAX REFORM BILL IS A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. IT WOULD ENLARGE THE MAXIMUM EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT FROM \$550 TO \$800. BUT THE EITC PROGRAM ALSO NEEDS TO BE EXPANDED, PRINCIPALLY BY ADJUSTING IT FOR FAMILY SIZE SO THAT BENEFITS INCREASE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN A FAMILY.

ON A MORE LONG-RANGE BASIS, WE COULD DEVELOP
PROGRAMS THAT SYSTEMATICALLY PROJECT THE
JOBS THAT WILL EXIST DURING THE NEXT DECADE
AND HELP STRENGTHEN THE CAPABILITY OF OUR
EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS TO MEET THESE
FUTURE JOB REQUIREMENTS.

SUCH PLANNING BECOMES ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT AT
A TIME LIKE THIS WHEN THERE ARE ENORMOUS
CHANGES IN JOB MARKETS AND JOB DEFINITIONS
AND WHEN WE ARE CLEARLY ENTERING A PERIOD OF
LABOR MISMATCHES IN WHICH THERE ARE JOBS THAT
CANNOT BE FILLED, AND PEOPLE WHO CANNOT FIND
JOBS.

THROUGH JOBS FOR CONNECTICUT'S FUTURE, A
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP THAT ALREADY HAS
DRAWN THE ATTENTION OF SEVERAL OTHER STATES,
CONNECTICUT IS WAY AHEAD OF MOST STATES IN
TERMS OF EFFECTIVELY ADDRESSING THIS ISSUE.
THE GOAL OF JOBS FOR CONNECTICUT'S FUTURE IS TO
PROVIDE 750,000 WELL-TRAINED AND WELL-EDUCATED
NEW WORKERS FOR THE STATE'S ECONOMY BY THE
YEAR 1995. THIS IS A COMPREHENSIVE AND
AMBITIOUS PROJECT. IT ESTABLISHES A CLOSER
WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND
PRIVATE SECTORS. IT INVOLVES MORE SOPHISTICATED
LINKS BETWEEN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT.
IT DESERVES OUR WHOLEHEARTED SUPPORT.

A RELATED ISSUE THAT WILL COMMAND MORE OF OUR ATTENTION IS THE QUESTION OF WHETHER PEOPLE IN POVERTY SHOULD BE REQUIRED TO WORK. MUCH OF THE CURRENT DEBATE ON THIS CONTROVERSIAL TOPIC FOCUSES ON WHETHER A DEBILITATING "CULTURE OF POVERTY" HAS DEVELOPED BECAUSE PEOPLE KNOW THEY WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO TAKE JOBS. PEOPLE WHO KNOW THEY MUST WORK IN ORDER TO SURVIVE, THE ARGUMENT GOES, STAND A BETTER CHANCE OF BECOMING SELF-RELIANT. AND SELF-RELIANT PEOPLE SUPPOSEDLY STAND A BETTER CHANCE OF PULLING THEMSELVES OUT OF POVERTY.

CAHS

THAT'S AN OVERSTATEMENT, OF COURSE. THE
EFFORTS OF MILLIONS OF WORKING POOR HAVE NOT
KEPT THEM OUT OF POVERTY. BUT THE POINT THAT
IS BEING MADE IS THAT WE NEED TO DEVELOP SOME
KIND OF NEW SYSTEM OF ASSISTANCE THAT IS
BASED ON INDIVIDUAL EFFORT.

THIS ISSUE OF WELFARE AND WORK WILL BE THE
TOPIC OF MUCH DEBATE -- SOME OF IT PROBABLY
QUITE HEATED -- IN FORTHCOMING MONTHS. LATER
THIS FALL, THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION WILL BE
RELEASING ITS MAJOR WELFARE AND WORK PROPOSALS.
THE CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION FOR HUMAN SERVICES
MAY CHOOSE NOT TO ENDORSE THESE PROPOSALS. IF
THAT IS YOUR CHOICE, THEN I URGE YOU TO
PARTICIPATE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOME
ALTERNATIVE PROPOSALS SO THAT YOU CAN BE AN
ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN THE CONSIDERATION OF
THESE ISSUES AT BOTH THE NATIONAL AND THE
STATE LEVEL.

CAHS

I WOULD ADD ONE PLEA AT THE SAME TIME,
WHATEVER THE OUTCOME THIS WORK AND WELFARE
DEBATE TAKES, LET US START WITH AN ABSOLUTELY
UNWAIVERING COMMITMENT THAT CHILDREN SHOULD
NOT BE PENALIZED OR DEPRIVED BECAUSE OF ANY
PERCEIVED SHORTCOMINGS ON THE PART OF THEIR
PARENTS.

CAHS

THE CENTRAL ISSUE INVOLVING CHILDREN IN THE
1980'S WAS STATED IN ITS MOST STARK AND
DRAMATIC TERMS BY SENATOR DANIEL PATRICK
MOYNIHAN OF NEW YORK. THE UNITED STATES, HE
POINTED OUT, MAY BE IN THE PROCESS OF BECOMING
THE FIRST SOCIETY IN HISTORY WHERE CHILDREN
ARE MUCH WORSE OFF THAN ADULTS. "IT IS TIME
WE REALIZED," SENATOR MOYNIHAN SAID, "THAT WE
HAVE A PROBLEM OF SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL CHANGE
UNLIKE ANYTHING WE HAVE EXPERIENCED IN THE
PAST, AND WE ARE COMPLETELY IGNORING IT".

CAHS

IN FACT, OF ALL THE DATA WE HAVE COLLECTED
ABOUT POVERTY, THE DATA THAT DISTURBS ME THE
MOST IS THIS:

ONE OF EVERY FOUR CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF
SIX IN THIS COUNTRY LIVES IN POVERTY, IN
OTHER WORDS, ONE OF EVERY FOUR CHILDREN GROWS
UP DEPRIVED DURING THE MOST CRITICAL
DEVELOPMENTAL PERIOD IN THEIR LIVES.

THESE ARE THE YEARS WHEN THE BASIC FOUNDATION
IS DEVELOPED FOR ALL THE PHYSICAL, INTELLECTUAL
AND EMOTIONAL GROWTH THAT WILL OCCUR IN LATER
YEARS. IF A CHILD DOES NOT GROW AS TALL AS HE
OR SHE MIGHT HAVE UNDER BETTER CONDITIONS, WE
CANNOT GIVE BACK TO THAT CHILD THE HEIGHT THAT
WAS LOST. WE CANNOT GIVE BACK THE BRAIN CELLS
THAT FAILED TO DEVELOP BECAUSE OF INADEQUATE
NUTRITION. WE CANNOT GIVE BACK THE EMOTIONAL
SUSTENANCE THEY MISSED OR THE SENSE OF PERSONAL
WORTH THEY SHOULD HAVE RECEIVED. WHATEVER IS
LOST DURING THESE YEARS IS LOST FOREVER. IT
CANNOT BE REPLACED.

CAHS

THE QUESTION WE HAVE TO ASK OURSELVES IS
WHETHER WE WANT THIS ONE IN FOUR RATIO TO BE
WORSE IN THE NEXT GENERATION -- OR WHETHER WE
WANT IT TO BE BETTER.

THAT'S A TOUGH QUESTION. THERE ARE MORE TOUGH
QUESTIONS WE AS A SOCIETY MUST BEGIN TO
ANSWER.

IS A COUNTRY THAT IS NOT COMMITTED TO FULL
FUNDING FOR HEAD START READY TO MAKE A MAJOR
COMMITMENT TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATIONAL AND
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO THE
POOR?

CAHS

IS A COUNTRY THAT PLACES LIMITS ON THE NUMBER
OF POOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN WHO RECEIVE THE
BENEFITS OF FOOD AND NUTRITION PROGRAMS
CAPABLE OF DEMONSTRATING TO FUTURE GENERATIONS
THAT THE CYCLE OF POVERTY CAN BE BROKEN?

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY WHO SAY
THEY ARE WILLING TO MAKE A MAJOR COMMITMENT
TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF CHILDREN -- BUT ONLY
AFTER WE REDUCE THE FEDERAL DEFICIT AND
BALANCE THE BUDGET.

MY ANSWER TO THAT LINE OF REASONING IS THIS:
WE CAN DEBATE THE FUTURE ALL WE WANT, BUT
THERE IS SIMPLY NO WAY TO ESCAPE THE BASIC
FACTS OF HERE AND NOW, TOO MANY OF OUR
CHILDREN ARE POOR, TOO MANY LIVE IN
SUBSTANDARD HOUSING, TOO MANY LACK ADEQUATE
MEDICAL CARE, TOO MANY RECEIVE AN INFERIOR
EDUCATION.

THE CHILDREN OF POVERTY DID NOT CREATE THE
DEFICIT, WHY SHOULD THEY BE ASKED TO PAY FOR
IT.

CAHS

I KNOW THE DANGERS OF DEFICIT SPENDING. I
KNOW HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO SUSTAIN LONG-TERM,
NON-INFLATIONARY ECONOMIC GROWTH AND REDRESS
OUR TRADE IMBALANCE. BUT I ALSO KNOW THAT
THIS COUNTRY CANNOT AFFORD TO PUT OFF RENEWING
ITS COMMITMENT TO THE POOR -- AND TO CHILDREN --
UNTIL WE PUT OUR MACROECONOMIC HOUSE IN ORDER.

INTELLECTUALLY, IT MAY MAKE SENSE TO GET THE
"BIG PICTURE" IN ORDER BEFORE WE TACKLE THESE
ISSUES ONCE AGAIN. BUT ONLY THOSE OF
US WHO ARE WELL FED, WELL HOUSED, WELL DRESSED
AND BLESSED WITH A WIDE-RANGE OF OPPORTUNITY
CAN AFFORD THAT CHOICE.

CAHS

IN ORDER TO MAKE MAJOR INROADS AGAINST POVERTY,
IN ORDER TO REDUCE THAT ONE-IN-FOUR RATIO,
WE WILL NEED TO REAFFIRM THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT
IN HELPING THE POOR AND THE DISPOSSESSED. WE
WILL NEED TO PUT ASIDE, ONCE AND FOR ALL, THE
NOTION THAT POVERTY, HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS
ARE PROBLEMS FOR EVERYONE BUT GOVERNMENT. WE
WILL NEED TO MAKE CLEAR ONCE AGAIN TO THE
AMERICAN PEOPLE THAT GOVERNMENT IS THE ONE
SOCIAL INSTITUTION IN THIS COUNTRY THAT IS
BEST ABLE TO HELP THE POOR AND THE DISPOSSESSED.
OUR EFFORT CANNOT BE LIMITED TO GOVERNMENT,
BUT IT CANNOT SUCCEED WITHOUT GOVERNMENT.

CAHS

WE CAN BEGIN BY VIGOROUSLY LOBBYING THE REAGAN
ADMINISTRATION AND THE U.S. CONGRESS TO COMMIT
THEMSELVES UNEQUIVOCALLY TO FULL FUNDING FOR
THE HEAD START AND WIC FEEDING PROGRAMS SO THAT
EVERY CHILD WHO IS ELIGIBLE CAN PARTICIPATE --
SO THAT WE CAN HAVE OUTREACH COMPONENTS FOR
THESE PROGRAMS RATHER THAN BUREAUCRATIC
HURDLES WHICH DISSUADE ENTRY.

CAHS

YET ANOTHER PROGRAM TO HELP CHILDREN IN
POVERTY THAT DESERVES OUR UNYIELDING SUPPORT
IS THE SO-CALLED TITLE I OR CHAPTER I PROGRAM
OF FEDERAL COMPENSATORY AID TO PUBLIC ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS SERVING HIGH CONCENTRATIONS OF LOW
INCOME CHILDREN,

FOR 20 YEARS THIS PROGRAM HAS PROVIDED MUCH
NEEDED ASSISTANCE. AND AS CHILDHOOD POVERTY
RATES INCREASE THIS PROGRAM BECOMES EVEN MORE
VITAL. NONETHELESS -- AND MYSTIFYING AS IT
MAY BE -- THE TITLE I PROGRAM IS IN DANGER OF
BEING DISMANTLED BY AN ADMINISTRATION THAT
PROPOSES TO REPLACE IT WITH A SYSTEM OF
VOUCHERS THAT SUPPOSEDLY WILL ALLOW POOR
CHILDREN TO ATTEND PRIVATE SCHOOLS.

CAHS

IN ADDITION TO SUPPORTING THOSE PROGRAMS WE
KNOW WORK, WE NEED TO LOOK AT SOME NEW IDEAS,
ONE WHICH I WOULD LIKE TO SEE EXPLORED IS A
NATIONAL MINIMUM BENEFIT LEVEL TIED TO INFLATION
WHICH WOULD PROVIDE A FINANCIAL FLOOR FOR
CHILDREN WHOSE PARENTS EITHER CANNOT FIND
WORK, CAN FIND ONLY LIMITED WORK, OR WHO MAY
NOT BE REACHED BY OTHER PROGRAMS OF ASSISTANCE.
WE ALREADY USE THIS FOR THE ELDERLY IN THE
SOCIAL SECURITY PROGRAM, WHY NOT CONSIDER IT
FOR MOTHERS AND CHILDREN IN THE AID TO FAMILIES
WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN PROGRAM?

CAHS

THERE ARE PLENTY OF POSSIBILITIES FOR US TO
PURSUE, THE REAL QUESTION IS CAN WE DEVELOP
THE CONSENSUS ON THESE ISSUES THAT OUGHT TO
EXIST, AND WHEN,

THIS PAST WEEKEND I SAW YOUR MOST RECENT AND
COMPELLING CAHS REPORT ON LOW BIRTHWEIGHT
BABIES AND INFANT MORTALITY IN CONNECTICUT.
THE TITLE OF THAT REPORT, TOO LITTLE, TOO
LATE, IS A POWERFUL REMINDER OF THE URGENCY
THAT MUST UNDERSCORE OUR EFFORTS.

CAHS

THAT TITLE, TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE, IN TURN
REMINDED ME OF A SHORT VERSE BY THE CHILEAN
POET GABRIELA MISTRAL WHO WON THE NOBEL PRIZE
FOR LITERATURE IN 1945. I WOULD LIKE TO CLOSE
WITH HER WORDS AND HOPE THAT THEY TOO CAN
SERVE AS A GUIDE FOR OUR EFFORTS. HERE IS
WHAT SHE WROTE:

CAHS

"MANY THINGS WE NEED CAN WAIT,

THE CHILD CANNOT,

NOW IS THE TIME HIS BONES ARE BEING FORMED,

HIS BLOOD IS BEING MADE,

HIS MIND IS BEING DEVELOPED,

TO HIM WE CANNOT SAY, 'TOMORROW.'

HIS NAME IS TODAY."

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.