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Voice of the African American Community

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Proposal Unveiled to Rebuild Washington's Welfare System

House Speaker Brian Ebersole and Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Helen Sommers recently unveiled a proposal to re-build Washington's welfare system on a foundation of work incentives and personal responsibility.

The House leaders said the state's welfare system should be used as a temporary safety net—not a way of life.

"We need to create a new contract for our welfare system," said Ebersole, a Tacoma Democrat. "The system should help people focus on the transition from welfare to work and provide incentives for people to move in that direction."

Sommers, a Seattle Democrat, said the plan is based on the results of the state's extensive research on welfare in Washington.

"That research tells us to focus on teenage mothers and long-term recipients," she said. "It's a carefully tailored plan, targeting the unique needs of key segments of Washington's welfare population."

Designed to promote personal responsibility, the proposal would phase down benefits for long-term recipients, while also offering an incentive to work.

The measure allows full benefits for four years. After that, welfare payments would be cut 10 percent every year. For a family of three, the standard monthly benefit of \$546 would be reduced by \$55 each year for mothers who stay

on welfare.

Under terms of this "new contract," welfare recipients could replace lost welfare benefits with wages earned at a job. This opportunity to maintain their incomes would give recipients an incentive to work.

The present system contains no incentive to work. Currently, every dollar earned through work means one dollar is cut from the welfare check.

The philosophy behind the proposal is that parents should be ready, willing and able to provide for and care for their children. A critical component is the plan's strong family planning element.

Citing a study that found 52 percent of women on welfare were teenage mothers, Sommers said a unique feature of the plan would prevent teenage pregnancy through media campaigns designed and produced substantially by teens.

This innovative approach would be conducted through schools, and would require matching contributions from the private sector. The plan envisions advertising companies and other firms with appropriate expertise joining in the partnership.

"Nobody can persuade teenagers to delay sexual activity, pregnancy and childbearing quite as well as other teens can," she said.

"But in addition, we've assigned state agencies an active role in combating teen pregnancy. They will provide

family planning assistance and instruction to welfare recipients and applicants."

Another unique feature of this welfare reform effort would deny additional benefits to a welfare recipient who has more children.

However, the mother could still raise the family income. As a incentive to work, instead of getting the extra welfare benefits she would be able to earn a corresponding amount through wages from a job without facing the usual loss of a dollar of benefits for every dollar earned in wages.

Ebersole pointed out the plan also stresses responsibility for fathers and grandparents. "We will make every effort to identify the fathers and hold them responsible for supporting their own children," Ebersole said.

"And if the father is a dependent, his parents will also be held responsible for the child."

Finally, the welfare reform plan seeks to change the culture of welfare. Caseworkers and others would be directed to change their message, thinking in terms of helping people get jobs, rather than determining eligibility for welfare checks.

Sommers and Ebersole said their plan would put the values of work and family back at center stage of the state's welfare system.

They also noted that while our society properly places great emphasis on rights, we have to remember the vital role of responsibilities.



McCullough's in Ebenezer Concert

Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church of Bremerton will present a musical concert to kick-off their African Tea featuring Reverend Dorsey and Loyce McCullough of Bethel AME Church of Portland, Oregon. The concert is slated for this Saturday, February 26 at 5 p.m. at Sinclair Missionary Baptist Church, 440 Union Street in West Bremerton. Reverend Dorsey McCullough is a former pastor of Ebenezer AME having served from 1970 to 1976. For more information, contact Pastor Williams at 373-1063.

HIV/AIDS Counseling Offered By Planned Parenthood

Last week, Planned Parenthood of Pierce and the Coastal Counties began offering HIV/AIDS counseling and testing at their clinics in Tacoma, Lakewood and Bremerton.

Soul Food Buffet set for February 28 at Olympic College

In honor of Black History Month the Olympic College Food Service/Culinary Arts Program will sponsor a "Soul Food Buffet" on Monday, February 28.

Between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. a menu of barbecue ribs, cornbread, red beans and rice, potato salad, collard greens, macaroni and cheese, sweet potato pie and carrot cake will be served in the Dining Library of the Bremer Student Center.

Cost is \$6.22 per person. Reservations are recommended. Call 478-4820.

Co-sponsors include the Students for Black Awareness (SABA) and Multi-Cultural Affairs.

For more information, call 478-6976.

The HIV/AIDS counseling and testing is available on either an anonymous or confidential basis. The service includes a blood test and pre and post-test counseling that assesses the individual's risk of infection and educates her/him about prevention.

There is a \$45 fee for the service.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, AIDS is the leading cause of death for American men aged 25-44.

However, the group with the highest number of new cases is women exposed through heterosexual contact. AIDS is the number four killer of women in the 25-44 age group.

It is also the sixth leading cause of death among young people aged 15-24.

Planned Parenthood encourages both men and women interested in HIV counseling and testing to call one of their clinics for an appointment: Bremerton, 373-6827; Tacoma, 572-6955; and Lakewood, 582-4144.

Women of Color Conference Scheduled

The public is invited to attend the fifth annual Women of Color conference on Saturday, March 12, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Entitled *Gaining Insights: Informing, Empowering, and Embracing our Strength*, the conference will be held at Olympic College and includes a continental breakfast and lunch for \$5.

Guest speakers include Bremerton Mayor Lynn Horton, KIRO TV personality Nerissa Williams, and Olympic College Board of Trustee member Gina Vicente.

Morning sessions will cover: Women and Health; Girls and Gangs; and Work-force: Today/Tomorrow.

Afternoon sessions will cover: Higher Education/

Continuing Education; Sexual Harassment/Sexual Awareness; and How to Get Financial Security Now (and for the rest of your life).

African American Heritage Is Focus of OC Program

"The Cultural Rainbow," a focus on African American Heritage, will visit Olympic College this Thursday, February 24, from 6 to 9 p.m. in A-103.

The program, presented by the Washington State Import/Export Company, Inc., will feature traditional African storytelling, authentic African artifacts and costumes, songs, and dances.

According to Margaret

Limited child care is available for children two years of age and above.

For more information, call 478-6976.

Swenson, multi-cultural affairs program assistant, "I would like to extend a personal invitation to this extraordinary learning experience especially designed for school age youth and culturally sensitive adults."

Olympic College students admitted free of charge; \$2 for 12 and over.

For more information, call 478-6976.

Take The Black History Month Quiz – See Page 5