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The cruelty of not cutting; How uncontrolled welfare spending perpetuates poverty

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Democrats insist that every dollar in the \$3.8 trillion annual budget is precious and well spent - all waste has been eliminated by sequestration. "The cupboard is bare," House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi said recently on CNN's "State of the Union." "There's no more cuts to make. ... We cannot have cuts just for the sake of cuts." Republicans and the facts suggest otherwise.

Republicans on the Senate Budget Committee observe that the federal budget has grown by 22.6 percent since President Obama ▼ took office - from \$3.1 trillion in fiscal 2009 to \$3.8 trillion in fiscal 2013. An extra \$700 billion here, an extra \$1 trillion there, and soon you're talking about real money. The national debt stands at \$17.1 trillion. There's nothing frugal about the government's husbandry of the people's money.

Sen. Jeff Sessions of Alabama, the committee's top Republican, added up the figures and found that \$3.7 trillion of the expenditure and the debt came from spending on welfare on Mr. Obama's watch. The federal welfare money is doled out through 83 different welfare programs, including food stamps, free school breakfasts and lunches, public housing, energy subsidies for low-income Americans, Head Start and Pell Grants. It's a sea of acronyms, subterfuge and redundancy. The list further includes Medicaid, whose rolls are ballooning under Obamacare.

These programs often overlap, and they all include "free" benefits, doled out to some who don't pay anything into the system. For every individual program, there's a federal fiefdom of administrators and staff dedicated to making sure the program constantly grows. Bureaucracies, like sharks, must keep moving and keep eating, or they die. Even without making a single cut, consolidating the programs to eliminate redundancy would save billions.

Beyond the \$3.7 trillion in federal spending, the states pile on hundreds of billions of dollars on their own, much of it for the required contributions to become eligible for the federal money. "The exclusively federal share of spending on these federal programs is up 32 percent since 2008," Mr. Sessions notes in his analysis of the figures, compiled from Office of Management and Budget data, "and now comprises 21 percent of federal outlays."

Mr. Sessions observes that welfare spending has jumped 378 percent over the past three decades, using inflation-adjusted dollars. It hasn't helped. The poor will always be with us, and as good citizens we have an obligation to help them, but reckless spending has only increased poverty by promoting wrong values.

The Cato Institute observed in a study in August that "because welfare benefits are tax-free, their dollar value was greater than the amount of take-home income a worker would receive from an entry-level job." A hypothetical low-income mother of two who takes advantage of eight welfare programs would collect more on the dole than she would make at a minimum-wage job in 35 states. In 12 states and the District of Columbia, the welfare outlay is the equivalent of a job that pays \$15 an hour or more. The system does not encourage financial independence.

There's nothing compassionate or conservative about a welfare system that promotes and perpetuates dependency. It's not good for the giver or the givee, and it's not good for the federal budget, either.