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## States Consider Drug Testing Welfare Recipients

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Georgia has joined almost two dozen state legislatures in either passing or considering testing welfare recipients for drug use. Florida passed legislation, however the ACLU filed to overturn the law stating that it violates the 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment provisions of unreasonable search and seizure. They were able to attain a temporary injunction until the case has been decided. Previously, Michigan had passed similar laws in the 1990's that ended up being overturned as unconstitutional. The question becomes if this round of legislation is blocked, what can be done to solve the problems associated with overwhelming costs besieging federal, state and local budgets?

The media and advocacy groups on each side of this issue are no help. The pro-welfare groups present heart-wrenching pictures of children starving and people dying in the streets. The anti-welfare groups paint a picture of most welfare recipients gaming the system, food stamps being sold for booze and drugs, multigenerational welfare families and illegal immigrants parasitizing tax payers for billions of dollars.

The truth of the matter is not easily found, especially within the government. There are so many different programs administered by different branches both at the federal and state level. Even think tanks studying this issue do not use the same measures or definitions of "welfare" or even poverty to allow informed conclusions to be drawn.

An excellent example of this are studies by The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank and The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, or CBPP, a progressive think tank. Both conducted studies on welfare and work. The Cato Institute included 7 benefits programs, including Medicaid, while CBPP only considered AFDC and food stamps.

As it stands now, there are 77 different welfare programs that are available at the federal level. Neither group included state and local welfare programs in their studies. Given the number of programs excluded from the studies, The Cato Institute's position that current welfare programs encourage government dependency by providing benefits exceeding that of the government's defined poverty level, therefore making it less cost effective for recipients to work, is a reasonable conclusion.

Senator Tom Coburn, from Oklahoma, gives further weight to Cato's conclusion in his efforts to disclose duplication and overlap in Federal government programs. Although

his investigative efforts are not complete, he found over 160 duplicative programs costing \$170 billion a year in housing assistance programs. He found 45 different programs costing at least \$13.3 billion a year for early learning and child care programs. He also found that of 50 programs for employing the disabled, 22 of the programs did not track or monitor any outcome measures.

Put simply, these programs did not measure whether the efforts, time and money being spent were actually helping the individuals they served. It would be interesting to see what groups that monitor charity organizations for administrative costs vs. actual expenditures for charity recipients receive would find in government run welfare programs.

Looking back at the original question of whether drug testing welfare recipients is an effective means of dealing with welfare costs and fraud, the answer is not that simple. Herman Cain, former Presidential candidate, made the comment “applying the right solutions to the right problem,” in several campaign speeches addressing the country’s economic problems. He makes an excellent point.

The political and ideological atmosphere is impeding the reasoned, methodical unwinding of who should be helped, how they should be helped and how long they should be helped, then whether what was done actually helped. The economic situation the country finds itself in may take the reins out of the hands of those with a vested interest in continuing the status quo in spite of the emotionally manipulative tactics used by those invested in “income redistribution” and “social justice”. The question at the top of the priority list is whether it will be before or after the financial cliff a growing number of economists and policy makers are predicting.

Since the Supreme Court ruling on the “Affordable Health Care Act”, a rather ironic misnomer, more federal programs and agencies have been added with little oversight or control over what was already in place. Rather than putting a tiny finger in one of thousands of cracks in our system, a long hard look needs to be taken at the system itself.

Rational adults with ethical and political fortitude, as well as a vision for the future, are needed to look at every government program, whether federal, state or local, to actually determine which programs are effective at their stated purpose and eliminate those that aren’t. In spite of the fears of those on various government programs instilled by political agendas, those individuals legitimately needing help would find that streamlining programs and government agencies would lead to more effective and timely help than our current system provides. Another upside of this is that legislation to drug test welfare recipients would potentially become a moot point.

The issue of welfare is an emotionally and politically charged issue that must first be resolved by deciding whether we as a nation will become more like France and Spain or do the work necessary to restore a Constitutional Republic that is limited in scope and answerable to its citizens, the owners and foundation of its authority.

Until that question is decisively resolved by the people in the selection of their representatives, the questions over welfare spending are effectively unanswerable. This decision will fall to those most committed, persistent and passionate over the future of the country and the legacy that is left for future generations to inherit. In making this decision, we as a country cannot indulge in the luxury of considering just our own circumstances like many politicians do to win their next election.

The time has come to take a longer view to deal with the situation we face as a nation. At this point, failing to decide or failing to engage is in effect a decision that will have an impact far beyond our own years.

For more information on this article:

<http://www.times-herald.com/Local/20120704NewLawsInEffect-MOS>

<http://www.cato.org/pubs/briefs/bp-027.html>

[http://www.coburn.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/rightnow?ContentRecord\\_id=a67daab3-c1ca-4f67-ad6e-8c13f97b91bd](http://www.coburn.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/rightnow?ContentRecord_id=a67daab3-c1ca-4f67-ad6e-8c13f97b91bd)

<http://articles.latimes.com/2010/sep/05/local/la-me-illegal-welfare-20100906>

<http://www.utexas.edu/depts/ic2/et/learner/general.html>  
(general characteristics of welfare recipients)

<http://www.concordcoalition.org/issue-briefs/2012/0227/structural-deficit-what-it-why-do-we-have-one-and-why-should-we-worry-about-i>

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