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Rep. George Miller (D-CA) Opening Statement for the Markup of H.J. Res. 118

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the ranking member of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce for the committee markup on H.J. Res. 118.

The committee meets today to vote on a Republican resolution to stop HHS from exercising a longstanding waiver authority. The waiver in question would permit governors to use innovative approaches to move more welfare recipients into employment.

Sixty days before a national election, the majority has chosen to totally distort the effort by the Administration to **increase** the number of welfare recipients obtaining work. Through the campaign looking glass, this is portrayed as an effort to **undermine** work.

Fact-checker upon fact-checker has publicly discredited the absurd attempt to characterize the waiver as going soft on work requirements. As former President Bill Clinton stated this week on other absurd claims – this is an old dog, a mangy old dog and despite the Republicans' persistent efforts – it just won't hunt.

This disapproval resolution would stop the administration's effort to increase state flexibility, reduce paperwork, and increase employment through a waiver authority Congress gave the executive branch over 20 years ago – authority that Republicans have supported time and time again.

In 2005, 29 Republican governors – including Governor Romney – wrote a letter urging adoption of a waiver authority for TANF much broader than what is being exercised by HHS. So broad in fact, that welfare time limits could be waived – a policy expressly not allowed under this waiver.

In fact, the 2005 Republican written Congressional report on the House TANF reauthorization proudly touts the bill's expanded waiver authority.

Today's debate is a dramatic turnaround for a party that for years pushed the mantra of state flexibility regarding federal regulations. As President Clinton recently said, it takes brass to denounce something that you yourself supported.

Clearly, this resolution is not about jobs or putting people to work. It's about squeezing out some kind of political advantage during an election campaign. The American people deserve a debate based on the facts, not distortions.

Fact: The administration's waivers do not gut welfare reform.

In 2011, President Obama issued an executive order directing his agencies to identify barriers to better outcomes in federally-funded programs. With this directive, HHS spoke with state TANF administrators to identify challenges in getting more people off of welfare into work.

They found three central complaints: (1) regulated activities are too restrictive; (2) too much time is spent on required documentation; and (3) too much time is focused on process instead of outcomes.

So, on July 12th, HHS sought to address states' concerns by issuing an "Informational Memorandum" that offered guidance regarding the department's waiver authority under the law. The Department said it was "encouraging states to consider new, more effective ways to...[help] parents successfully prepare for, find, and retain employment."

In other words, contrary to statements coming from the Republican majority, the Obama administration didn't gut welfare reform at all. Rather, they encouraged states to undertake innovations to **increase employment** among those who receive benefits.

Let me repeat that: Increase employment.

According to the agency memorandum, and I quote once again, "HHS will **only** consider approving waivers relating to the work participation requirements that make changes **intended to lead to more effective means of meeting the work goals of TANF.**" Secretary Sebelius has since strengthened this directive by writing that states must show a 20 percent increase in work participation of welfare recipients.

And the statute encourages such innovation. Section 1115 of the law states that the Secretary has authority "to consider and approve experimental, pilot, or demonstration projects which, in the Secretary's judgment, are likely to assist in promoting" moving participants into jobs.

TANF is supposed to be a temporary safety net during which adults can get the job search or job training help they need to find work and stay employed.

The fact is that under current welfare rules, states have been stifled and unable to move more people off welfare into self-sufficient jobs. Benefits for a family of three were less than half of the poverty line in *all* states.

That's why the administration moved to act on the TANF waiver authority that Congress gave them. That's why the administration moved to increase state authority to experiment with welfare policies that are designed to increase employment.

Unfortunately, Republicans have chosen to polarize, politicize, and now obstruct.

The majority's rhetoric is totally out of line with reality. It is also completely inconsistent with their stance about state control they've taken in this committee over the last two years.

The outrage over the administration's waiver proposal stands in stark contrast to the Workforce Investment Act bill that the majority pushed through this committee just weeks before the administration's announcement.

The mantra of that Republican bill is state flexibility. It provides so much state flexibility that a state with an approved unified workforce training plan can, at its discretion, eliminate work requirements from TANF funding altogether.

And the *administration* is gutting welfare reform? Really?

At the end of the day, this resolution wastes precious legislative time when we should be working together to provide solutions for the real unemployment problems confronting American families.

This House could have spent the past two years focused on job creation. But it hasn't.

This House could have spent the past two years since TANF expired working on a new law that drove accountable innovation in the states and helped more families get off welfare. But it hasn't.

If the majority wants to get serious about moving more TANF recipients to work, shouldn't we be spending the committee's time creating jobs rather than engaging in election year political stunts?

Wouldn't taxpayer dollars be better served if this committee worked together to bring jobs back to America and prevent them from being outsourced overseas?

I think so. But that's not on the agenda today.

Today we're dealing with a fabricated problem, driven by election year campaigns, instead of addressing real problems for American families.

I urge my colleagues to reject this resolution.

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