

Transcript
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CHARLES OSGOOD: Good morning. I'm Charles Osgood, and this is SUNDAY MORNING.

What is better for the poor of this country? Shall we maintain for them the web of programs critics say has hurt more than it has helped, or shall we clear away that web and start over, requiring the poor to live not Without a Net altogether but with a different sort of net-different in size, shape and purpose? So go the questions being asked just now in Washington. But it may be that the answers are to be found elsewhere. Terence Smith will report this morning's cover story.

Representative SAM GIBBONS (Democrat, Florida): This is a cruel, mean bill to children. It takes...

(Footage of Congress; of welfare recipients; of students; of Newark skyline; of housing project)

TERENCE SMITH: *(Voiceover)* While Congress debates welfare reform, there are programs all around the country that are going about the day-to-day business of assisting the poor. Here in Newark, New Jersey, a community-based organization is providing jobs, housing and health care to people who desperately need it.

This SUNDAY MORNING, we'll take a look at welfare that works and at a new report released today that argues that the nation can ill afford not to help its most disadvantaged.

WITHOUT A NET

CHARLES OSGOOD, host: No one is suggesting that America's poor go Without a Net altogether. What is being suggested, however-and more than suggested: urged and planned for-is that the net be redesigned and stretched out in different ways. Two days ago the House of Representatives passed what is called the Personal Responsibility Act, which makes sweeping changes in a welfare system that has been taken for granted by Americans for nearly 60 years now. Those in favor say that the net has shown itself to be not a safety device but a trap in which people become entangled. Those opposed argue for caution: Being entangled is better in the end, they say, than an unbroken, straight fall to the ground. Listen to the extreme positions in this debate and you get the impression

that nothing this country does for the poor works. But as Terence Smith reports now in this morning's cover story, that isn't true.

(Footage of Congress)

Unidentified Man #1: Two minutes. Two minutes to the gentleman from Texas.

Representative DICK ARMEY (Republican, Texas): Disregard the fiction from those who would have us do nothing but defend and protect the status quo.

Unidentified Representative #1: Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to this mean-spirit Republican bill. It is...

(Footage of Congress; of Shaw with Smith)

TERENCE SMITH reporting: *(Voiceover)* On the House floor this past week, members were taking the first controversial steps towards reforming the way in which the nation provides assistance to its poor. Republican Congressman Clay Shaw is one of the principal authors of the welfare reform bill.

Representative CLAY SHAW (Republican, Florida): This is the most significant piece of legislation, other than declarations of war, that is going to affect the life and future of more people in this country than has come out of the Congress in the last 50 years.

(Footage of House of Representatives)

Man #1: The House will be in order. The House will be in order...

(Footage of Congress; close-up of report, The State of Families)

SMITH: *(Voiceover)* And with the debate as background, a comprehensive report released today argues that the situation in America's inner cities is getting worse, not better.

Mr. LYNN CURTIS (President, Milton Eisenhower Foundation): Today one out of every five American children is in poverty. That is a stunning statistic in terms of the country that is the only superpower in the world.

(Footage of Curtis)

SMITH: *(Voiceover)* Lynn Curtis, president of the Milton Eisenhower Foundation, has been studying America's urban problems for a quarter century.

Mr. CURTIS: We know a lot about what doesn't work for reducing child poverty and a lot about what does work. And so the real issue today is: Can we find the resources to carry out to a scale that's equal to the dimensions of the problem what actually does work for reducing child poverty?

(Footage of teens on street)

TYRONE BURTON: I was from-from Dorchester and I was just run-I was in-I was in that street life, you know, that street mind, just doing crazy things-robbing people, getting robbed, stealing cars, doing everything-and it just, you know, it wasn't working. That-that was my life before DYC.

(Footage of DYC building; of teens)

SMITH: *(Voiceover)* DYC stands for the Dorchester Youth Collaborative, and Tyrone Burton is one of hundreds of Boston youths who have found a haven there from the mean streets.

BURTON: They took us from the streets and brought us to, you know, a nice, warm second home, like, you know, and they just try to help us out. They do help us out.

(Footage of students at table)

SMITH: *(Voiceover)* This youth center is one of dozens of programs that the Eisenhower Foundation highlights in the report as a success.

Mr. CURTIS: *(Voiceover)* We've got kids who are at a critical age-they're teen-agers-and at a critical time, when they're unsupervised, and that's when we work with them.

Mr. EMMETT FOLGERT (Director, Dorchester Youth Collaborative):
Olympics.

Unidentified Youth: You're always busy, Emmett, man.

(Footage of Folgert with youth; of basketball game)

SMITH: *(Voiceover)* Emmett Folgert is the director of the center. He and a small staff of counselors work to keep the high-risk kids of Dorchester away from the street gangs that dominate the area.

Mr. FOLGERT: We've got two kids to pick up at Fox.

We're an agency that fills the gap in that we provide a lot of support for kids after school and between the time when their parents get home.

(Footage of students boarding van)

(Voiceover) And once we get to know them and have a relationship, we provide a lot of supervision for them, and we watch what they do. We drive around the neighborhood, and if they start to get involved in anything, we intervene.

We try to stop them before it's too late.

Want a ride? Here you go.

(Footage of students with Folgert)

PHUONG DUONG: *(Voiceover)* It's like a big family up there. Everybody's like a brother, sisters. Everybody work with each other.

(Footage of Duong)

SMITH: *(Voiceover)* Phuong Duong is a Vietnamese immigrant and one of the increasing number of Asian-American kids frequenting the center.

DUONG: If there wasn't no you-youth center, I would have been, you know, doing all these fights and violent stuff...

(Footage of Folgert with Duong and other students)

(Voiceover) ...or I would have been in a hospital, be hurt right now-I don't know, in big gangs.

Mr. FOLGERT: Oh, yeah?

DUONG: Yeah.

Mr. FOLGERT: So how did you do the interview if you were so hungry?

DUONG: I don't know. I...

Mr. FOLGERT: *(Voiceover)* We want the kids that a lot of other people don't want. We treat them like they're really a big deal-because they are.

SMITH: Federal funds are crucial to programs like the Dorchester Youth Collaborative, but here on Capitol Hill, the Republicans are proposing not only a reduction; but a wholesale revision of the way in which those monies are distributed. The welfare bill, which passed the House last week and now goes to the Senate, would let the states take charge of the system.

Rep. SHAW: Let's have more faith in our states. Let's have more faith in the creativity of-of-of man and the ability of them to reach down and to bring people out of poverty. That's what we're trying to do, and that's what I think we must accomplish.

Mr. CURTIS: There's no information that suggests that state bureaucracies will be any better than the federal bureaucracy.

(Footage of Curtis)

SMITH: *(Voiceover)* Lynn Curtis' proposed solution is even more radical than that of the Republicans.

Mr. CURTIS: It, therefore, makes sense to devolve our policy past the states to the community level, to the grassroots, where we can do the most good.

(Footage of neighborhood)