

TALKING POINTS  
10TH ANNIVERSARY WIC CONFERENCE  
OLD COLONY INN  
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA  
7:00 P.M. - FEBRUARY 8, 1984

- AS THE CURRENT CHAIRMAN OF THE NUTRITION SUBCOMMITTEE AND A STRONG SUPPORTER OF THE WIC PROGRAM, I AM VERY PLEASED TO BE HERE WITH YOU TONIGHT, IN HONOR OF WIC'S 10TH ANNIVERSARY.
- YOUR THEME "DECADES OF GROWTH THROUGH NUTRITION" IS PARTICULARLY APPROPRIATE WHEN WE REFLECT UPON THE TREMENDOUS SUCCESS STORY REPRESENTED BY WIC. IT IS AN EFFECTIVE NUTRITION PROGRAM WHICH HAS ALSO DEMONSTRATED ITS COST-EFFECTIVENESS IN HEALTH TERMS OVER TIME. THE NOW-FAMILIAR STATISTIC CITED - THAT EVERY DOLLAR SPENT ON WIC PROGRAM BENEFITS SAVES THREE DOLLARS IN POTENTIAL MEDICAL COSTS - IS BECOMING A FAMILIAR STATEMENT AT EVERY CONGRESSIONAL HEARING HELD ON THIS PROGRAM. CONGRESS HAS RESPONDED TO THIS GREAT SUCCESS STORY WITH STRONG BIPARTISAN SUPPORT.
- PART OF THE REASON FOR WIC'S POPULARITY IS THE FACT THAT ITS BENEFITS ARE TIED TO STRICT NUTRITIONAL STANDARDS -- IT IS A REAL NUTRITION PROGRAM, AS OPPOSED TO A FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, LIKE FOOD STAMPS. WIC VOUCHERS CAN ONLY BE CASHED IN FOR VERY SPECIFIC TYPES OF FOOD, DESIGNED TO MEET THE SPECIAL HEALTH NEEDS OF A PREGNANT OR NURSING WOMAN, INFANT, OR CHILD. THE VULNERABLE NATURE OF THE POPULATION SERVED BY THE PROGRAM ALSO CONTRIBUTES TO ITS POPULARITY.
- IN AN ERA OF BUDGET CUTS AND FISCAL AUSTERITY, THE SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN HAS BECOME LEGENDARY IN ITS ABILITY TO ESCAPE THE BUDGET AX -- IN FACT, IF ANYTHING, WIC HAS RECEIVED ADDITIONAL FUNDING AT A TIME WHEN MOST PROGRAMS WERE BEING CUT BACK OR HAVING THEIR GROWTH RESTRAINED. A TOTAL OF \$300 MILLION WAS ADDED TO THIS PROGRAM IN LAST YEAR'S JOBS BILL.

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- IF, AT ANY UNLIKELY TIME IN THE FUTURE, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FOUND A SURPLUS IN THE U.S. TREASURY, THIS PROGRAM WOULD MOST LIKELY BE THE FIRST IN LINE FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDING. HOWEVER, AS YOU ARE PROBABLY WELL AWARE, NO SUCH POSSIBILITY EXISTS IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE WITH DEFICITS LOOMING IN THE \$200 BILLION RANGE AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE.
- WIC HAS ALWAYS BEEN MY FAVORITE FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAM (I CAN SAY THAT BECAUSE THERE ARE NO FOOD STAMP PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS IN THIS AUDIENCE). I HAVE PARTICIPATED ACTIVELY IN ITS LEGISLATIVE HISTORY AND WATCHED IT ~~PROGRESS DEVELOP~~ OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS FROM AN OFFSHOOT OF THE COMMODITY SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD PROGRAM.
- THE CURRENT SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC) WAS CREATED IN 1972, AT A FUNDING LEVEL OF \$20 MILLION, AS A TWO-YEAR PROGRAM TO PROVIDE FOOD ASSISTANCE TO PREGNANT WOMEN, NURSING MOTHERS, INFANTS AND PRESCHOOL CHILDREN CONSIDERED TO BE AT NUTRITIONAL RISK. BETWEEN AUGUST 1973 AND DECEMBER OF 1973 A TOTAL OF 216 PROJECTS HAD BEEN APPROVED. BY 1976, FUNDING HAD INCREASED TO \$250 MILLION. IT WILL NOW COST \$1.360 BILLION IN FY 1984, ASSUMING THE CURRENT CASELOAD OF 3 MILLION PARTICIPANTS IS MAINTAINED.
- AS I HAVE ALREADY STATED, THE WIC PROGRAM HAS STRONG SUPPORT FROM CONGRESSIONAL REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS ALIKE -- IT MAY BE THE POLITICALLY MOST POPULAR PROGRAM IN THE CONGRESS. HOWEVER, ITS POTENTIAL FOR GROWTH MAKES SOME MEMBERS NERVOUS FROM TIME TO TIME, AND IT IS THIS TREMENDOUS POTENTIAL FOR GROWTH THAT HAS CAUSED CONCERN ON THE PART OF THE ADMINISTRATION.
- I KNOW THERE IS SOME CONCERN BECAUSE OF THE WAY THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET HAS PRESENTED THE FUNDING FIGURES FOR THE UPCOMING FISCAL YEARS, BUT I FULLY EXPECT THE CONGRESS TO EXERT PRESSURE AND MAKE CERTAIN THAT FULL FUNDING IS AVAILABLE TO CARRY US THROUGH THIS FISCAL YEAR. IT WOULD BE VERY UNLIKELY THAT THIS ADMINISTRATION WILL PLAY POLITICAL GAMES WITH THE WIC PROGRAM IN AN ELECTION YEAR.

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- AT LAST COUNT, WIC WAS ESTIMATED TO BE SERVING ONLY ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF THE POTENTIAL ELIGIBLE POPULATION. PERHAPS AT THIS POINT IN TIME, WITH THE REAUTHORIZATION PROCESS COMING UP THIS SPRING, WE SHOULD MAKE SOME CHANGES THAT BETTER TARGET AVAILABLE PROGRAM BENEFITS TO WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN WHO ARE MOST AT NUTRITIONAL RISK. I KNOW THERE IS ALREADY, UNDER REGULATION, AN EXISTING PRIORITY SYSTEM - PERHAPS THIS SHOULD BE WORKED INTO THE LAW SOMEHOW. WE WOULD BE MOST WILLING TO LISTEN TO YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ANY PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS THAT SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION DURING THE REAUTHORIZATION PROCESS.
- DEALING WITH THE WIC PROGRAM IN THE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE IS A REAL PLEASURE, COMPARED TO DEALING WITH FOOD STAMP ISSUES. WIC IS NOT HAUNTED BY THE SAME COMPLAINTS OF FRAUD AND ABUSE -- IT DOES NOT HAVE A NEGATIVE PUBLIC IMAGE. ACTUALLY, ONE HEARS ONLY GOOD THINGS ABOUT THIS PROGRAM, EXCEPT FOR OCCASIONAL FUNDING CRISES.
- SOME ATTENTION HAS BEEN GIVEN TO A RECENT GAO REPORT EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SIX WIC PROGRAM STUDIES THAT HAVE BEEN DONE IN THE PAST. ALTHOUGH ONE MAY QUESTION THE METHODOLOGY USED IN SOME INSTANCES, THE RESULTS OF THESE STUDIES FOR THE MOST PART SHOW A POSITIVE BENEFIT FROM WIC PARTICIPATION IN REDUCING THE INDIDENCE OF LOW BIRTHWEIGHT. AS WE KNOW, THERE IS A DIRECT CORRELATION BETWEEN LOW BIRTHWEIGHT AND A HIGH INCIDENCE OF INFANT MORTALITY. THIS CAN ALSO MEAN EXPENSIVE NEONATAL CARE, AS WELL AS A LOT OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES. AS A RESULT OF WIC, SOCIETY CAN BE SPARED THE HIGH COST OF MEDICAL CARE FOR SUCH INFANTS, BECAUSE OF GOOD NUTRITIONAL INPUT IN THE MOTHERS.
- ALTHOUGH, THE GAO STUDY DESCRIBES THE EVIDENCE DATA FROM EXISTING STUDIES AS "INCONCLUSIVE", THE REPORT GOES ON TO SAY "THE GENERAL RESULTS INDICATE THAT PARTICIPATION IN WIC IS ASSOCIATED WITH A 16-20 PERCENT DECREASE IN THE PROPORTION OF LOW-BIRTHWEIGHT INFANTS BORN TO WOMEN ELIGIBLE FOR WIC. MEAN BIRTHWEIGHT APPEARS TO RISE ABOUT 1 TO 2 PERCENT. WIC MOTHERS APPEAR TO EXPERIENCE GREATER BENEFIT THE LONGER THEY PARTICIPATE."

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- WHILE THE GAO REPORT HAS JUST BEEN PUBLISHED, WE ARE CURRENTLY AWAITING THE RESULTS OF THE FIRST MAJOR NATIONWIDE USDA WIC EVALUATION STUDY WHICH SHOULD BE AVAILABLE THIS FALL. THE PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE ON FOOD ASSISTANCE HAS RECOMMENDED THAT THE WIC PROGRAM BE REAUTHORIZED FOR ONE YEAR PENDING THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY. HOWEVER, IT MIGHT BE ADVISABLE TO EXTEND THE PROGRAM BEYOND FY 1985, SINCE WE WILL ALSO BE DEALING WITH A MAJOR FARM BILL AND FOOD STAMP REAUTHORIZATION THAT YEAR.
  
- THE NUTRITION SUBCOMMITTEE PLANS TO HOLD HEARINGS EARLY NEXT MONTH ON THE REAUTHORIZATION OF THE CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS, AND WE WOULD WELCOME YOUR INPUT AS TO RECOMMENDED CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS FOR THE WIC PROGRAM.