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Jason Smith's Capitol Report - Friday, August 26, 2016

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Congressman Jason Smith Capitol Report The Future of Welfare Reform August 26th, 2016

This week marks the 20th anniversary of “welfare reform” and at the time it was hailed as one of the most widespread changes to addressing federal poverty our nation had ever seen. They promised it was the end of welfare as we would know it. While this reform 20 years ago did help some people escape poverty, it is clear we have an entirely new round of obstacles that are placing more Americans into the poverty trap.

Moving people from welfare to work is the only way to successfully and sustainably lift someone out of poverty. From 1995 through 2007, 1.5 million single mothers moved from welfare to work, lowering the number of children trapped in poverty as well. This not only provided personal financial independence to families, but showed their next generation a path forward. Incentives that offer jobs to those trapped in poverty do work. In fact, the amount of people receiving assistance from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program has decreased by over 60 percent since 1996. That translates to a decrease of over 10 million people who rely on government welfare assistance today.

The bad news is that the welfare reform 20 years ago was narrowly focused to apply to

only a few programs and did not apply to all government welfare and anti-poverty support programs. Therefore today our country has upwards of 46 million Americans still marred in poverty. In fact, almost two out of three working age adults who are living in poverty today do not have a job. This is a direct result of a current welfare system that does not encourage or reward work. Sadly, many trapped in poverty today have more of an incentive to stay on government assistance instead of going out and getting a job to move out of poverty.

As a result, House Republicans are proposing a new plan to combat the cycle of poverty in this country. Growing up in rural Missouri, I know first-hand that the current welfare system is broken. I remember well the trailer my family lived in when I was younger and pumping water from a cistern at my grandparents in order to get our fresh water. I understand just how hard it can be to escape the cycle of poverty, especially in south central and southeast Missouri.

I have taken a leadership role in helping reform our current welfare support system both on the Ways and Means Committee, the Human Resources Subcommittee, and on the newly created Task Force on Poverty, Opportunity and Upward Mobility. My goal is to help people who are struggling not only back home in Missouri, but across the nation escape the cycle of poverty by offering incentives for people to work to pull themselves out of poverty. It is also important to me that people understand the difference between the urban poverty they often read about in newspapers and the rural poverty that effects areas all over the country like ours. With over 46 million people living in poverty today, reforming the welfare system is a top priority in this country. We cannot continue to spend close to \$1 trillion each year on so called welfare reducing government programs without seeing any improvements to the overall poverty rate.

I continue to remain committed to working with my Republican and Democrat colleagues to move forward on a better way plan to reduce poverty and give everyone the opportunity to realize the American dream. Very soon I hope we will be able to usher in the next era of welfare reform that also kicks off the greatest resurgence in an American economic recovery and demonstrates American success and generosity, but also shows the importance of personal freedom and responsibility, as the cornerstone of our great Republic.

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