and community service among the boys of this country. Troop 138 of Sacred Heart Parish has built a reputation for providing the youth of the community with the leadership skills needed to be successful in today’s society. Boy Scouts of America provides good, solid role models for the youth of our Nation, and teaches them to be community minded. In this organization, they learn valuable skills that will serve them for a lifetime. I am proud to have such an outstanding Boy Scout troop here in the Granite State. Congratulations on reaching this tremendous milestone.

THE QUALITY OF MERCY

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I ask that an excellent article about welfare, “The Quality of Mercy”, by James McQueeny, be printed in the Record.

Mr. President, I had the good fortune of benefiting from Jim McQueeny’s competence and compassion when he served as my press secretary several years ago. These same qualities are evident in his article, which is an eloquent statement about what it means to be on welfare, and what the welfare reform bill will mean for real people. I urge all my colleagues to read the article.

The article follows:

(From the New Jersey Monthly, July 1995)

The Quality of Mercy—Many New Jerseyans Believe That Welfare Is a Waste. One Man—Now a Successful Executive—Who’s Lived on It Disagrees

By James McQueeny

I’m not a member of any obvious minority group (being the son of an Irish immigrant no longer counts), although these days I might qualify as out of the mainstream because my views on race seem to place me even more squarely in the minority. And I am very concerned about what we as a society are saying and doing about that issue.

We in New Jersey, the second richest state in the nation, are in the best position possible to do something about poverty and welfare reform, yet we’re going about it with the worst possible attitude. The very success of New Jersey’s post-war suburbanization has fueled what some pollsters call the Drawbridge Mentality—the mindset of people who find their castle and pull up the drawbridge on everybody and everything else. And who in suburbia actually lives near someone on welfare? The answer is “nobody,” which means really nobody. By name. By face.

I do. I was one of them. So I’ve always been aware of poverty slights, and they’re on the increase. I’ve cringed at a “progressive” suggestion by a prominent New Jersey business leader who told me he wants to help the poor “get off their ass.” As if these people wake up every morning looking for ways to make themselves poorer. Or the Democratic politician who was trying to rationalize reforming welfare by not extending benefits to additional people. He said it was because the child had a choice of mother and neighborhood.

As someone who has lived at the extreme ends of the economic spectrum in New Jersey, I know firsthand the frightening reality of life in poverty. I grew up on welfare, in a well-off town in Bergen County, one of the wealthiest counties in the state. I worked my way up through the ranks of New Jersey’s largest newspaper, covering every county in the state. And I eventually became the paper’s Washington bureau chief. Later, I was a television reporter for New Jersey Network, and I was the first New Jersey State Senator. I am now the president and an owner of a multimillion dollar company.

I point this out only to emphasize that I know what it means to live a normal life after starting out poor—and on welfare—in New Jersey. And now, a day hardly goes by without a personal incident or a public headline reminding me how much harder it is for a New Jersey for the disadvantaged to find a similar path of opportunity. And that upsets me.

Several months ago, I was at Menlo Park Mall conducting voter interviews with a camera team for a weekly political commentary I do for NJN. Person after person in these opulent surroundings rallied against big government. The phrase “welfare cheats” was usually the caboose on their long trains of lamentations about our society. As I stood before them, I reverted to a habit I’ve had since poverty. I looked at the shoes of the people I was talking to. Why? Probably because they were poor and in their shoes. And I thought good shoes were the province of “rich people.” Our “school shoes” were worn only to school, and Mass, and they had to last for the whole term, based on still poorly-made shoes. I can still recall going into town to a business that had an industrial staple gun, so I could either secure the flapping soles or patch the holes of cloth studded from the inside so no one would notice.

Instinctively, my gaze fell upon the shoes of the people complaining about things being so bad in our society. Without exception, they were wearing designer shoes—those kinds of sneakers that salespeople bring to you so delicately you think they are explosives, or those spiffy Rockport walking shoes. I was so amazed by those walking shoes that I was compelled to go into a shoe store and price them. One hundred and twenty dollars! On sale! With those kinds of shoes on their feet, they’re feeling that much anger? I thought. And about what? Not complaining about what they don’t have. They’re complaining that they don’t have enough. Has poverty become so trivialized that the person who’s Down and Out are those who can’t afford Rockports?

Unfortunately, it looks like it. I only wish that some of these people could have learned the lessons of poverty the way I did—through experience. Like the time I couldn’t tell my teacher I didn’t have $1.50 for a science magazine subscription because I’d be revealing that I was on welfare. Instead, I always said I forgot the money. He marked me up as a wise-guy deportment case, which helped drive my grades down.

Some teachers sent me scraggly shoes in front of classmatess, unthinkingly viewing them as an issue of cleanliness rather than pennilessness.

On one free field trip (I stayed behind in the hall for the paid ones), I borrowed a camera from a classmate on the bus to take a picture of a certainExamples of s mundane highway bridge that crossed the Passaic River, about ten miles from home. They all had a riotous laugh when they found out I’d never been this far from home because we never had a car.

And, yes, we were forced to “cheat” on welfare, too. The “welfare lady” visited the house at pre-arranged times to make sure we weren’t buying things that would indicate alternative incomes of some kind. That would be cheating the taxpayer. I had to hide any evidence of the prosperity I was enjoying form my paper route—even the household essentials we bought with the money I earned.

The point of this little recollection is that I am very concerned about the Democrats starting out poor, and on welfare—in New Jersey. And now, a day hardly goes by without a personal incident or a public headline reminding me how much harder it is for a New Jersey for the disadvantaged to find a similar path of opportunity. And that upsets me.

One of the problems is that Congress, and state legislators, are overstocked with affluent lawyers, professionals, and full-time politicians who are more than able and willing to craft proposals on how to put the people in their own backyards out of a job—no matter how you cook the books to sell the program back to the states with guidelines about cutting off benefits to the needy to morrow, while declaring victory today. The reason that this reform plan won’t work is that you can cut spending all you want, but the same mothers and children will have the same food and sheltering needs at roughly the same cost come tomorrow—no matter how you frame the issue. How much would it cost, for instance, to provide every child with a personal computer? What about the programs that are needed for the children of the people who live in poverty: You do not choose it; by and large, it chooses you.

The Democratic party meant to do well when it stitched together the welfare safety net during the Depression. And welfare worked well enough for a while. But as time passed, we didn’t have the political common sense to stop sewings when it wasn’t working well enough. We do need to come up with something else.

But the latest plan being bandied about, the Contract With America welfare-reform plan, really boils down to turning the program back to the states with guidelines about cutting off benefits to the needy to morrow, while declaring victory today. The reason that this reform plan won’t work is that you can cut spending all you want, but the same mothers and children will have the same food and sheltering needs at roughly the same cost come tomorrow—no matter how you frame the issue. How much would it cost, for instance, to provide every child with a personal computer? What about the programs that are needed for the children of the people who live in poverty: You do not choose it; by and large, it chooses you.

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