

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard. The bill will be read the second time on the next legislative day.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT AGREEMENT

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that if and when the Environment and Public Works Committee reports legislation that amends, modifies, deletes, or in any way affects transit provisions contained in section 135 of title 23, United States Code, it be referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs for a period of not to exceed 20 session days of the Senate, solely for the purpose of considering such provisions, and that if not reported by the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs by that time, it be discharged and placed on the Senate calendar.

I further ask that if and when the Banking Committee reports legislation that amends, modifies, deletes, or in any way affects highway transportation provisions contained within section 135 of title 23, United States Code, it be referred to the Committee on Environment and Public Works for a period not to exceed 20 session days of the Senate, solely for the purpose of considering such provisions, and that if not reported by the Environment and Public Works Committee by that time, it be discharged and placed on the Senate Calendar.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

DEADBEAT PARENTS PUNISHMENT ACT OF 1998

Mr. LOTT. I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to consideration of Calendar No. 369, H.R. 3811.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3811) to establish felony violations for the failure to pay legal child support obligations, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the immediate consideration of the bill?

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. DEWINE. Mr. President, I rise today in support of final passage of the Deadbeat Parents Punishment Act authored by my distinguished colleague, Senator HERB KOHL from Wisconsin. Senator KOHL has worked tirelessly to strengthen our child support laws, and I have been happy to lend my support to this effort.

The House bill we pass today mirrors the Senate-passed version that we sponsored earlier this session. I believe children should not have to suffer twice for the decisions of their parents to divorce; once when they decide to divorce, and again when one of the parents evades the financial responsibility to care for them.

Let me tell you just one story from my home state of Ohio. Marcia Walsh, the mother of seven children, became one of the working poor when she and her husband divorced, and he neglected his child support order. He left Ohio, leaving Marcia to support seven children, ages 6 to 15, on food stamps and a \$14,000-a-year night job. When Marcia turned to our federal Child Enforcement Program, she discovered a failed program whose collection rate is only about 19.4 percent.

Mr. President, people like Marcia and her children deserve better than that.

Our bill will help address situations like theirs, in two ways. First, the Deadbeat Parents Punishment Act gives federal law enforcement an incentive to bring more of these cases against deadbeats by making this offense a felony. Second, this legislation would make movement from state to state to avoid child support payments a crime. Today, nonpayment of child support is a class B misdemeanor, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation is frustrated at having to chase deadbeats for just a class B misdemeanor. Federal prosecutors are equally discouraged about trying misdemeanor cases.

It is currently not a crime to move to another state to avoid having to pay child support. Under this bill, not paying child support for two years, owing more than \$10,000 in back child support, or going to another state to avoid child support payments would be penalized by a fine or two years in jail, or both. If the parent flees the state where the child resides, and owes more than \$5,000, the same penalty described above would apply.

Mr. President, making sure parents live up to their financial responsibilities for their children is a very important national priority. We have serious laws in this country protecting life and property—it's highly appropriate that we protect with equal seriousness the interests of our most precious national resource, America's children.

I thank Senator KOHL for his work on this important bill.

Mr. KOHL. Mr. President, I rise today to express my support for the final passage of our Deadbeat Parents Punishment Act and to commend Senator DEWINE, cosponsor of the Senate version which we passed last November, along with Chairman HYDE and Congressman HOYER for their commitment to promoting the welfare of children and to strengthening our child support laws. In sum, this measure sends a clear message to the deadbeat parents of America: pay up or go to jail.

Mr. President, when the original Child Support Recovery Act of 1990 was first enacted, Senator SHELBY and I hoped to make a real impact on the non-payment of support orders. And we did make some progress. Over 200 more cases of nonpayment were prosecuted. Over 50 went to jail. Of the 150-some remaining cases, many were dropped when the defendant agreed to pay the

support arrears. And some very high profile cases prosecuted under this law have also made some potential deadbeats think twice before not paying. But for some deadbeats the threat of a misdemeanor sentence still isn't enough to keep them paying. Many would rather "risk it." They know that if they get caught for a first offense—no matter how big their debt and no matter how long they went without paying—they aren't facing a felony conviction.

Now, Mr. President, we are not trying to throw people into jail. We'd rather they paid their child support on time and in full. And many parents—mothers and fathers—do just that. But some need a little extra incentive to fulfill their responsibilities. The threat of a year in prison and a felony conviction on their records, contained in this bill, provides that much needed incentive.

It has been estimated that if delinquent parents fully paid up their child support, approximately 800,000 women and children could be taken off the welfare rolls. In fact, Mr. President, since our original legislation was signed into law in 1992, collections have increased by nearly 50 percent, from \$8 billion to \$11.8 billion. Moreover, a new national database has helped identify 60,000 delinquent fathers—over half of whom owed money to women on welfare.

Although we should be proud of these efforts, they are merely a point of departure, not a final destination. It seems to me that in passing this legislation, we all recognize that we can not simply stop and rest on our laurels. We must continue to work on behalf of children and families. We must give police and prosecutors the tools they need to make a real impact on the non-payment of child support. And today, we have taken that next step, we have done these things, and we have continued this important work. I look forward to the President's signing this bill into law, which will help ensure that deadbeats across the country sign more child support checks.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I would like to notify the Senate that this is the bill that is commonly referred to as the Deadbeat Parents Punishment Act, and I appreciate the cooperation that we received on both sides of the aisle today to get this legislation through, because it is clearly something that should be passed. We should have felony violations for failure to pay legal child support obligations. I am glad to move the legislation.

I ask unanimous consent the bill be considered read a third time and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and any statements relating to the bill be printed at the appropriate place in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 3811) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.