

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

A STARK ASSESSMENT: U.S. REPRESENTATIVE PETE STARK SPEAKS OUT ON HEALTHCARE AND WELFARE REFORM

HON. JOHN LEWIS

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 19, 1999

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I insert the following for printing in the RECORD:

[From the World, Jan.–Feb. 1999]

(By David Reich)

When President Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, more commonly known as the welfare reform bill, US Rep. Fortney Pete Stark didn't make a secret of his displeasure. "The president sold out children to get reelected. He's no better than the Republicans," fumed Stark, a longtime unitarian Universalist whose voting record in Congress regularly wins him 100 percent ratings from groups like the AFL-CIO and Americans for Democratic Action.

One of the Congress's resident experts on health and welfare policy, the northern California Democrat has earned a reputation for outspokenness, often showing a talent for colorful invective, not to say name-calling. First elected to the House as an anti-Vietnam War "bomb-thrower" (his term) in 1972, Stark has called Clinton healthcare guru Ira Magaziner "a latter-day Rasputin" and House Speaker Newt Gingrich "a messianic megalomaniac." When the American Medical Association lobbied Congress to raise Medicare payments to physicians, Stark, who chaired the Health Subcommittee of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee, called them "greedy troglodytes," unleashing a \$600,000 AMA donation to Stark's next Republican opponent.

"I've gotten in a lot of trouble speaking my mind," the congressman admits with a rueful smile. For all his outspokenness on politics, Stark appears to have a droll sense of himself, and he tends to talk softly, his voice often trailing off at the ends of phrases or sentences.

Back in the 1960s, as a 30-something banker and nominal member of the Berkeley, California, Unitarian Universalist congregation, Stark upped his commitment to the UU movement after his minister asked him to give financial advice to Berkeley's Starr King School for the Ministry. "I think I was sandbagged," he theorizes. After a day of poring over Starr King's books ("The place was going broke," he says), he was invited by their board chair to serve as the seminary's treasurer. "I said, 'Okay,'" Stark recalls. He said, "Then you have to join the board," I said, "I don't know. I guess I could."

The UUing of Pete Stark culminated at his first board meeting, when the long-serving board chair announced his resignation and Stark, to his astonishment, found himself elected to take the old chair's place. "There I was," he reminisces, his long, slim body curled up in a wing chair in a corner of his Capitol Hill office. "And I presided over a

change in leadership and then spent a lot of time raising a lot of money for it and actually in the process had a lot of fun and met a lot of terrific people."

The World spoke with Stark in early October, as rumors of the possible impeachment of a president swirled around the capital. But aside from a few pro forma remarks about the presidential woes ("His behavior is despicable, but nothing in it rises to the level of impeachment"), our conversation mainly stuck to healthcare and welfare, the areas where Stark has made his mark in government.

World: You have strong feelings about the welfare reform bill. Do the specifics of the bill imply a particular theory of poverty?

PS: They imply that if you're poor, it's your fault, and if I'm not poor, it's because I belong to the right religion or have the right genes. That the poor are poor by choice, and we ought not to have to worry about them. It's akin to how people felt about lepers early in this century.

World: Does the welfare reform law also imply any thinking about women and their role in the world?

PS: Ronald Reagan for years defined welfare cheat as a black woman in a white ermine cape driving a white El Dorado convertible and commonly seen in food check-out lines using food stamps to buy caviar and filet mignon and champagne and then getting in her car and driving on to the next supermarket to load up again. And I want to tell you she was sighted by no less than 150 of my constituents in various supermarkets back in my district. They were all nuts. They were hallucinating. But they believed this garbage.

And then you've got the myth that, as one of my Republican neighbors put it, "these welfare women are nothing but breeders"—a different class of humanity.

World: You raised the idea of belonging to "the right religion." Do these views of poor people, and poor women in particular, come out of people's religious training?

PS: No, my sense of what makes a reactionary is that it's a person younger than me, a 40- or 50-year-old man who comes to realize he isn't going to become vice president of his firm. His kids aren't going to get into Stanford or Harvard or make the crew team. His wife is not very attractive-looking. His sex life is gone, and he's run to flab and alcohol.

World: So it's disappointment.

PS: Yes. And when the expectations you've been brought up with are not within your grasp, you look around for a scapegoat. "It's these big-spending congressmen" or "It's these women who have children just to get my tax dollar. The reason I'm not rich is that I pay so much in taxes; the reason my children don't respect me is that the moral fabric has been torn apart by schools that fail to teach religion."

And then there's a group that I've learned to call the modern-day Pharisees, people from the right wing of the Republican party who have decided the laws of the temple are the laws of the land.

World: Then religion figures into it, after all.

PS: Oh, yeah, but to me that's a religion of convenience. In my book those are people with little intellect who listen to the Bible on the radio when they're driving the tractor or whatever. But I do credit them with being seven-day-a-week activists unlike so many other Christians.

World: Going back to the welfare reform bill itself, how does it comport with the values implied by the UU Principles, especially the principle about equity and compassion in social relations?

PS: If you assume we have some obligation to help those who can't help themselves, if that's a role of society, then supporters of the welfare reform bill trample on those values. "I'm not sure that's the government's job," they would say. "It's the church's job or it's your job. Just don't take my money. I give my cleaning lady food scraps for her family and my castaway clothes to dress her children. I put money in the poor box. What more do you want?"

The bill we reported out, the president's bill, was motivated by the belief that paying money to people on public assistance was, one, squandering public funds and, two, preventing us from lowering the taxes on the overtaxed rich. I used to try and hammer at some of my colleagues, and occasionally, when I could show them they were harming children, they would relent a little, or at least they would blush.

World: Did you shame anyone into changing his or her vote or making some concessions on the language of the bill?

PS: We got a few concessions but not many. Allowing a young woman to complete high school before she had to look for a job, because she'd be more productive with a high school education—you could maybe shame them into technicalities like that. But beyond that they were convinced that if you just got off the dole and went to work, you would grow into—a Republican, I suppose.

World: It's been pointed out often that many people who supported the bill believe, as a matter of religious conviction, that women should be at home raising kids, yet the bill doesn't apply this standard to poor women. Can the bill's supporters resolve that apparent contradiction?

PS: Yes, I hate to lay out for you what you're obviously missing. The bill's supporters would say that if a woman had been married and the family had stayed together as God intended, with a father around to bring home the bacon, then the mother could stay home and do the household chores and raise the children. They miss the fact that they haven't divided the economic pie in such a manner that the father can make enough money to support mother and child.

Now, I do think young children benefit grandly, beyond belief, by having a mother in full-time attendance for at least the first four years of life. But given the reality that a single mother has to work, you have to move to the idea of reasonable care for that mother's child. And by reasonable care I do not mean a day care worker on minimum wage who's had four hours of instruction and doesn't know enough to wash his or her hands after changing diapers and before feeding the kid. Or who's been hired without a

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criminal check to screen out pedophiles. Because it's that bad.

World: Did the welfare system as it existed before the 1996 bill need reform?

PS: Sure. The Stark theory—which I used to peddle a thousand years ago, when I chaired the House Public Assistance Committee—is that people have to be allowed to fail and try again and again—and again. We can't let people starve, but they've got to learn to budget money and not spend it all on frivolous things. So I'd have cashed out many of the benefits. For instance, instead of giving you food stamps worth 50 bucks, why don't I give you the 50 bucks? The theory behind food stamps was that you'd be so irresponsible you'd buy caviar and wine and beer and cigarettes and not have any money left for tuna fish and rice. And that kind of voucher doesn't give you the chance to learn.

We did a study, good Lord, in the 1960s in Contra Costa County, California. Our church was involved, along with the United Crusade charity, and some federal money went into it, too. We identified in the community some people who had never held a regular job—either women who had done day work or men who were nominally, say, real estate brokers but hadn't sold a house in years. And in this study we took maybe 20 of them and made them community organizers—without much to do but with an office and a job title. All this was to study what happened to those people when they had regular hours and a regular paycheck, having come from a neighborhood where people didn't necessarily leave for the office at every morning at 7:30.

And we found that these people suddenly became leaders, that people in the neighborhood came to them for advice. They even talked about going into politics, just because of the fact that they fit into the structure and what that did for their self-image and their neighbors' image of them.

Another part of that program: in the poorest parts of our community people were given loans to start new stores—wig shops and fingernail parlors and liquor stores and sub shops and soul food places and barbecue pits. The stores had little economic value but lots of social value. They were places where children of the families who owned them went after school, and people didn't sleep or piss in the doorways or leave their bottles there because the street with these shops became a community that had some cohesion—though when the funds were cut back, it reverted to boarded-up shops.

World: Are you suggesting that this kind of program might work for current welfare recipients?

PS: Absolutely. I don't believe for a minute that 99 percent of people, given the opportunity, wouldn't work. They see you and me and whoever—the cop on the beat, the school teacher, the factory worker, the sales clerk—going to work. People want to be part of that. It's just like kids won't stay home from school for very long. That's where the other kids are, that's where they talk about their social lives. That's where the athletics are. And so it is with adults: they want to be part of the fun, of the action.

Inefficient as some people's labor may be, as a last resort, bring them to work in the government. It would be so much more efficient than having to pay caseworkers and making sure they're spending their welfare checks the right way. Give them a living wage, damn it. They'll learn. And given time, their efficiency as economic engines will improve.

World: Do you have a clear sense of how the changes in the system are affecting welfare clients so far?

PS: No, and I'm having a major fight with our own administration over it. Olivia Golden, who until recently headed up the family, youth, and children office in the Health and Human Services Department, sat there blithely and told me "Welfare reform is working!" I said, "Olivia, what do you mean it's working?" "Well, people all over the country have told me—" "How many?" "Maybe 12." I said, "Are you kidding? You've talked to maybe 12 people?"

They won't give us the statistics. They say, "The states don't want to give them to us." All we know—the only figures we have—is how many people are being ticked off the rolls. What's happened to the people who leave the rolls? What's happened to the kids? The number of children in poverty is starting to go up—substantially, even when their family has gotten off welfare and is working.

World: One of the arguments in favor of the welfare bill involved "devolution." Do you accept the general proposition that states can provide welfare better than the federal government?

PS: Well, the states were always doing it, under federal guidelines. Now we've taken away the guidelines and given the states money with some broad limitations.

I have no problem with local communities running public assistance programs. They're much closer to the people and much more concerned, and somebody from Brooklyn doesn't know squat about what's needed in Monroe County, Wyoming, where an Indian reservation may be the sole source of your poverty population. But I want some standards—minimum standards for day care, minimum standards for job training. I'm talking about support standards, not punishment standards.

World: And the current bill has only punishment standards?

PS: Basically. It's a threat, it's a time limit, it's a plank to walk.

World: What about the idea that welfare reform would save the government money? How much money has been saved?

PS: I can get the budget figures for you, but I suspect we haven't saved one cent. I mean, do homeless people cost us? What is the cost in increased crime? We're building jails like they're going out of style. Does the welfare bill have anything to do with that? I don't know, but I wouldn't make the case that they're unrelated.

So if you take the societal costs—are we saving? And it's such a minuscule part of the budget anyway. It's like foreign aid. I could get standing applause in my district by saying, "I don't like foreign aid." And if I ask people what we're spending on it, they say, "Billions, billions!" We spend diddly on foreign aid. The same is true for welfare. Any one of the Defense Department's bomber programs far exceeds the total cost of welfare.

World: Is there any hope of improving the country's welfare system in the short of medium term, given that the 1996 bill did have bipartisan support?

PS: It had precious little bipartisan support, but it had the president. No, I don't think we're apt to make changes. And what's fascinating is that with the turn in global events our economy may have peaked out. We may be heading down. And while this welfare reform may have worked in a booming economy, when the economy turns down, those grants to the states won't begin to cover what we'll need.

World: If Congress isn't likely to do anything, what can people in religious communities do to make sure the system is humane?

PS: They can get active at the state and local level. Various states may do better things or have better programs or more humane programs. And the lower the level of jurisdiction, the easier it is to make the change, whether it's in local schools or local social service delivery programs.

The other thing is to take the lead in going to court. It's the courts that have saved us time after time—in education, women's rights, abortion rights. We need to look for those occasions where a welfare agency does something illegal—and there will be some—and take up the cause of children whose civil rights are being violated.

World: Let's shift over to healthcare. In the 1992 presidential campaign, the idea of a universal healthcare plan was seen as very popular with the voters. Why did the Clinton health plan fail?

PS: I'd like to blame it on Ira Magaziner and all the monkey business that went on at the White House—the secret meetings and this hundred-person panel that ignored the legislative process. Their proposal became discredited before it ever got to Congress. We paid no attention to it. My subcommittee wrote our own bill which accomplished what the president said he wanted. It provided universal coverage, it was budget-neutral, and it was paid for on a progressive basis.

World: And it did that by expanding Medicare?

PS: Basically it required every employer to pay, in effect, an increase in the minimum wage, to provide either a payment of so much an hour or add insurance. And if they couldn't buy private insurance at a price equivalent to the minimum wage increase, they could buy into Medicare—at no cost to the government, on a budget-neutral basis. But the bill allowed private insurance to continue, with the government as insurer of last resort.

We got it out of committee by a vote or two, but then on the House floor, we couldn't get any Republican votes. They unified against it, so we never had the votes to bring it up.

The Harry and Louise ads beat us badly. People were convinced that government regulation was bad, per se. It was just the beginning of the free market in medical care, which we're seeing the culmination of now in the for-profit HMOs and the Medicare choice plans that are collapsing like houses of cards all over the country. But back in 1993 the idea was "Let the free market decide. HMOs will be created. They'll make a profit, they'll give people what they want. People will vote with their feet and the free market will apply its wonderful choice."

World: Did that bill's defeat doom universal healthcare for a long time to come?

PS: It certainly doomed it for this decade and things are only getting worse. We now have a couple of million more people uninsured. We're up to about 43.5 million uninsured, and we were talking about 41 million back in 1993. And people on employer-paid health plans are either paying higher copays or getting more and more restricted benefits. Plus early retirement benefits are disappearing so that if people retire before 65, they often can't get affordable insurance. It will have to get just a little worse before we'll have a popular rebellion. We're seeing in the managed care bill of rights issue where people are today. To me, that's the most potent force out there in the public.

World: In both areas we've been discussing assistance to the poor and health insurance, the US government is taking less responsibility than virtually all the other industrial democracies.

PS: Why take just democracies? Even in the fascist countries, everybody's got healthcare. We are the only nation extant that doesn't offer healthcare to everybody.

Take our neighbor Canada. There is no more conservative government on this continent, north or south. I've heard the wealthiest right-wing Canadian government minister say: "I went to private prep schools, but it never would occur to us Canadians to jump the queue, go to the head of the line in healthcare. We believe healthcare is universal. Now, we fight about spending levels, we fight about the bureaucracy, and we fight about how we're working the payment system." But they don't question it.

World: In the US we do question it—the right to healthcare, that is, Why?

PS: It's connected with this idea of independence. Where do we get the militias from, and those yahoos who run around in soldier suits and shoot paint guns at each other?

World: The frontier ethos?

PS: Maybe, maybe. And the American Medical Association is not exactly exempt from blame. The physicians are the most antigovernment group of all. They're the highest paid profession in America by far, and so they are protecting their economic interests. Though the government now looks a little better to them than the insurance industry because they have more control over government than over the insurance companies.

Look, the country was barely ready for Medicare when that went through. It just made it through Congress by a few votes. There are some of us who would have liked to see it include nursing home or long-term convalescent care. That can only be done through social insurance, but people won't admit it. They say, "There's got to be a better way." It's a mantra. On healthcare: "There's got to be a better way." Education: "There's got to be a better way."

They've yet to say it for defense though. I'm waiting for them to privatize the Defense Department and turn it over to Pinkerton. Although in a way they have. There's a bunch of retired generals right outside the Beltway making millions of dollars of government money training the armed forces in Bosnia. I was there and what a bunch of crackpots! They've got these former drill sergeants over there, including people out to try to start wars on our ticket.

World: A few more short questions. Have the culture and atmosphere of the House changed in the years since you arrived here?

PS: Yes, though I spent 22 years in the majority and now four in the minority, so I may just be remembering good old days that weren't so good. Back when I was trying to end the Vietnam War. I was in just as much of a minority as I am now, and I didn't have a subcommittee chair to give me any power or leverage.

On the other hand, look at the country now. Look at TV talk shows—they argue and shout and scream, and then they call it journalism. Maybe we're just following in their footsteps.

World: Is it a spiritual challenge for you to have to work with, or at least alongside, people with whom you disagree, sometimes violently?

PS: Yes, and I don't a very good job. My wife says, "When you retire, why don't you become an ambassador?" And I say, "Diplomacy doesn't run deep in these genes." But it's tough if you internalize your politics and believe in them.

Still, I like legislating—to make it all work, to take all the pieces that are pushing

on you, to make the legislation fit, to accommodate and accomplish a goal. It really makes the job kind of fascinating. I once reformed the part of the income tax bill that applies to life insurance, and that's one of the most arcane and complex parts of the tax bill. It was fun—bringing people together and getting something like that. And actually writing that health bill was fun.

But not now. We don't have any committee hearings or meetings anymore. It's all done in back rooms. Under the Democratic leadership we used to go into the back room, but there were a lot of us in the room. Now they write bills in the speaker's office and avoid the committee system. I mean, it's done deals. We're not doing any legislating, or not very much.

World: Do you think about quitting?

PS: No, I don't think about quitting. I'd consider doing something else, but I don't know what that is. Secretary of health and human services? Sure, but don't hold your breath until I'm offered the job. Even in the minority, being in the Congress is fascinating, and as long as my health and faculties hold out. * * * I mean, I'm not much interested in shuffleboard or model airplanes.

MASS IMMIGRATION REDUCTION ACT

HON. BOB STUMP

OF ARIZONA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 19, 1999

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, on January 6, with the support of 48 original cosponsors, I introduced the Mass Immigration Reduction Act. My bill, formerly called the Immigration Moratorium Act, provides for a significant, but temporary, cut in legal immigration to the United States.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that many Members of this body would be surprised to learn that the immigrant population is now growing faster than at any time in our nation's history. The number of immigrants living in the United States has almost tripled since 1970, from 9.6 million to 26.3 million. This profusion in immigrants has a profound and costly impact on our way of life. For example, the net annual current fiscal burden imposed on native households at all levels of government by immigrant households nationally is estimated to range from \$14.8 to \$20.2 billion. As troubling, the poverty rate for immigrants is nearly 50 percent higher than that of natives. This suggests that our immigration policies are not only unfair to citizens, but are a disservice to immigrants who come here looking for a better, more prosperous way of life. As federal legislators, we have an obligation to take a serious look at our immigration policies and the problems that stem from them. It is our duty to devise an immigration system that is in our nation's best interest.

Under my proposed legislation, immigration would be limited to the spouses and minor children of U.S. citizens, 25,000 refugees, 5,000 employment-based priority workers and a limited number of immigrants currently waiting in the immigration backlog. The changes would expire after five years, provided no adverse impact would result from an immigration

increase. Total immigration under my bill would be around 300,000 per year, down from the current level of about one million annually. I should emphasize that my bill is not intended to serve as a permanent long-term immigration policy. It would provide a lull in legal immigration, during which time we would have an opportunity to reevaluate America's immigration needs and set up more appropriate conditions under which immigrants may become permanent residents of the United States.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, let me stress that we should continue to welcome immigrants to our great country. However, we should do so under a well-regulated policy that is based upon America's needs and interests. Currently, we lack such a policy. Our system allows for unmanageable levels of immigrants with little regard for the impact the levels have on our limited ability to absorb and assimilate newcomers. I strongly urge my colleagues to examine our immigration system and ask themselves whether it is in the best interests of their constituents to continue the unprecedented trend of mass immigration. I encourage Members to support my bill, and look forward to productive debate on this important issue.

LEGISLATION TO RAISE THE MANDATORY RETIREMENT AGE FOR U.S. CAPITOL POLICE OFFICERS FROM 57 TO 60

HON. JAMES A. TRAFICANT, JR.

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 19, 1999

Mr. TRAFICANT. Mr. Speaker, on January 6, 1999 I introduced legislation to change the mandatory retirement age for U.S. Capitol Police Officers from 57 to 60. It is identical to legislation I introduced in the last Congress, and I urge all of my colleagues to support this important bill.

As every Member of Congress knows, the Capitol Police is one of the most professional and dedicated law enforcement agencies in the country. They perform a vital and important function. The force is blessed to have a large number of experienced and highly competent officers. Unfortunately, every year dozens of officers are forced to leave the force because of the mandatory retirement rule. Many of these officers are in excellent physical condition. Most important, they possess a wealth of experience and savvy that is difficult, if not impossible, to replace.

Raising the mandatory retirement age from 57 to 60 will provide the Capitol Police with the flexibility necessary to retain experienced, highly competent and dedicated officers. It will enhance and improve security by ensuring that the force experiences a slower rate of turnover.

I introduce this legislation at a time when the Capitol Police is struggling to increase the size of its force in the face of an increased workload. For example, I have spoken to a number of officers who are routinely working up to 56 hours of overtime a month. Plans by the Capitol Police Board to hire an additional 260 officers will not fully alleviate this serious problem. Raising the retirement age will certainly help to reduce the workload of the force.