

Point of View

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TO BE EQUAL

LIFTING WORKERS OUT OF POVERTY

By John E. Jacob

There have always been disagreements about the causes of poverty and about how to assure minimally decent living standards for those who do not or cannot work.

There is a consensus, though, that if a person plays by the rules and works full time, that person shouldn't be poor.

The legal minimum wage is set so low that full-time workers still earn too little to escape poverty. So the government came up with the Earned Income Tax Credit for working families.

The EITC operates as an income supplement — low income households with children get a check from the government at tax time.

Unfortunately, the credit is still too low to lift families headed by full-time minimum wage workers out of poverty — a family of four, even with EITC, still winds up \$5,100 below the poverty line.

Even so, the EITC is an important aid to the working poor. A report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities indicates the extent of the problem:

* Over 9 million workers are poor, and over 2 million of them

worked full-time, year round.

* Some 20 million people — a majority of the poor — lived in households where someone worked during the year.

* About 5.5 million people living in poor families with children were part of a family containing a member who worked full-time year round.

While most of the working poor are white, African Americans are more likely to be in low wage jobs and to be poor. More than two out of five minority working families with children have incomes low enough to qualify for EITC income supple-

ments.

So the EITC is critical to making work pay and to alleviating the effects of poverty, a fact recognized by President Clinton when he said, in his state of the union address:

"By expanding the refundable earned income tax credit, we will make history; we will reward the work of millions of working poor Americans by realizing the principle that if you work 40 hours a week and you've got a child in the house, you will no longer be in poverty."

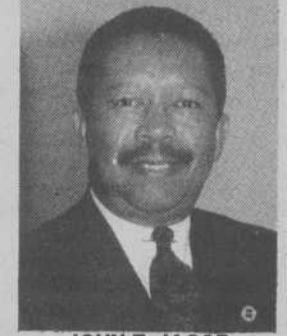
The Clinton proposal would expand the credit for families

with two or more children, expand the credit for families with one child that have incomes below \$12,000, establish a small new credit for poor workers without children, and simplify the EITC.

The Clinton plan drew wide support from conservatives and liberals alike — no surprise since it is an effective, pro-family, pro-work proposal.

But now, that plan is in trouble, along with the rest of the President's economic package. Resistance to tax hikes for the affluent and for business is leading Congress to look for bigger spending cuts, gutting much of the economic stimulus program.

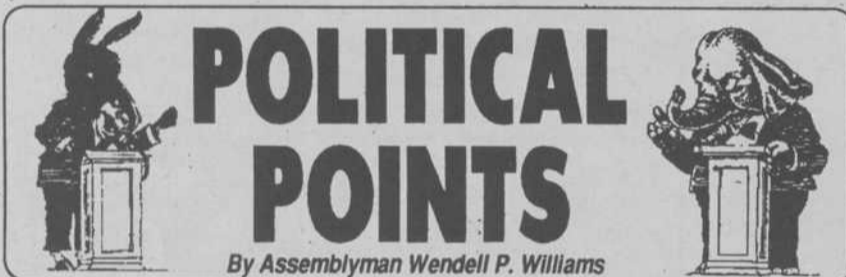
Expansion of the EITC should not be the victim of such budget slashing. Congress should be at least as concerned with the plight of the working poor as it is with the special interests seeking to preserve their privileges.



JOHN E. JACOB

A higher minimum wage would raise the incomes of the working poor — today's minimum wage is about 22 percent lower, after adjusting for inflation, than it was in the 1970's. A boost in the minimum wage would also result in lower federal spending on the EITC. But Congressional opposition has led the President to delay plans to raise the minimum or to index it to the inflation rate.

That leaves the expansion of the EITC as the last hope for low-wage workers to climb out of poverty. Fairness and sound social policy suggests that Congress should pass the EITC expansion without diluting it.



NONCHALANT

Even my 14 year old son, who is nicknamed nonchalant, became excited earlier this week at the Nevada State Legislature after hearing discussion surrounding some of the ridiculous criminal justice laws on Nevada's books. For instance, Nevada has a law that proclaims it illegal to walk the wrong way in a street crosswalk. Believe it or not, if you walk across the street in a designated crosswalk and do not walk to the right within the crosswalk, you are a law-breaker.

This type of kangaroo justice system is probably just one of the reasons that Nevada has one of the highest prison and jail incarceration rates in the entire free world. In fact, since 1985, Nevada has had the title of "champion of incarceration." And as much as you hear about racist South Africa, Nevada has twice as many people locked up. In 1992 Nevada fell to fourth place only behind Louisiana, South Carolina and Delaware. Based on the incarceration rate per 100,000 people,

Nevada has 440 people locked up for every 100,000. That's six times more people per capita than communist China.

Nevada can no longer remain nonchalant on its justice system and continue on this mad fast track of lock'um for every imaginable thing. The reality of our situation is that we have people in prison in this state that would not be in prison in any other state in the nation for the crime that they committed. And the criminal justice system in Nevada has become inundated with criminal cases which poses a problem to the entire judicial system. Add to that the distrust that an evergrowing number of people have in receiving fair justice, threatens the system and a peaceful society even more.

This time last year, Nevada as well as the entire nation, was on edge awaiting not only the Rodney King verdicts, but a number of other cases that many feared would bring violence because the justice system has lost the confidence of the people. It brings home the old saying "NO JUSTICE-NO PEACE". Just think of all the manpower and

money spent on trying to keep the peace simply because there is no confidence in the system anymore. And why not? At least since 1979 in Las Vegas alone, every single shooting by a police officer has been ruled excusable or justifiable by a coroner's inquest. And not a single one has been ruled criminal since 1976. This practice must be investigated and some things must change.

I'm very pleased to note that on last Tuesday the state legislature passed Assembly Concurrent Resolution #76 which I drafted and sponsored that directs the legislative Commission to conduct an interim study of Nevada's criminal justice system including the following:

1. Whether discretion is being used by law enforcement officers when making decisions as to whether to file criminal charges.
2. The criteria used to determine whether to admit a defendant to bail and in what amounts.
3. The factors relating to the assignment of counsel and access to counsel once counsel is appointed.



Assemblyman
Wendell P. Williams

4. An analysis of decisions which have been made by juries and judges in criminal cases to determine if they have been made without bias.

5. Access by indigent persons to post-conviction remedies and other matters as they relate to parole.

6. The methods used in the selection of jurors.

7. A comparison of sentencing decisions relating to probation, incarceration and fines.

8. Review of the processes use in plea negotiation and bindover decisions.

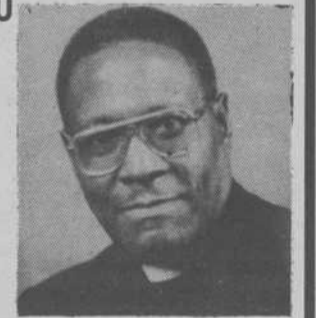
9. Inquiry into the matter of economic and racial injustice in the administration of the criminal system.

These are very serious factors affecting all of us, and are the keys to eliminating the vast desprity in the system that we must challenge. Nonchalant is a nickname given to my son Wesley by his peers and should not be our state of being in dealing with Nevada apartheid.

THE NAACP AND YOU



Rev. Jesse D. Scott
President
Las Vegas, NAACP



BLACKS BECOME ALIVE IN 1995

In Nevada it seems as if Blacks have been dead as far as not being included in or receiving our fair share of the states political and economic pie of.

There just appears to be, on the distant horizon, an opportunity for Blacks to do something in Nevada that we have never (See NAACP and You, Page 4)

Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice

Nevada's only African-American community newspaper.
Published every Thursday by Brown Publishing Co., Inc.
1201 South Eastern Avenue • Las Vegas, Nevada 89104
Telephone (702) 383-4030 • Fax (702) 383-3114

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This newspaper is audited by:
Community Papers Verification Service,
6225 University Ave., Madison, WI 53705
(608) 238-7550

Subscriptions payable in advance
Six months \$15.00
Twelve months \$25.00
The rates apply to
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