

State welfare reform deal reached

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SACRAMENTO UNION CAPITOL BUREAU

Calling it a historic compromise, Democrats and Republicans announced agreement Wednesday on a sweeping "workfare" reform of the welfare system.

The program, expected to save an estimated \$136 million a year when fully operational, also would require many welfare recipients to take public-service jobs that do not replace regular workers.

In addition to the work provision long sought by Republicans, the compromise also contains job training and education intended to lead to permanent jobs and an innovative "contract" to help the individual control his own destiny.

The proposal was immediately denounced by

the Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, which issued a list of problems.

Kevin Aslanian, coalition spokesperson, said the program only covers a third of the welfare caseload, mostly women with children, and would let "big brother" force them into jobs rather than find work on their own.

At a Capitol news conference, legislators from both parties gave Assemblyman Art Agnos, D-San Francisco, credit for working out the agreement with Health and Welfare Secretary David B. Swoap.

Agnos said the compromise was built on years of work in the Legislature during which a "political gridlock" blocked reform.

"Everyone agrees that the current welfare system is a failure," said Agnos. "It merely maintains people in a state of dependency and

dependency."

One of the steps leading to the breakthrough was a trip by Agnos and Swoap and four others to view workfare programs in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

Among the congratulatory gestures at the news conference, Swoap said he would present Agnos with a framed copy of the single page on which Agnos skillfully "synthesized" their respective positions.

Sen. John R. Garamendi, D-Walnut Grove, author of pilot workfare legislation and a standout athlete at the University of California at Berkeley, handed Agnos a football and told him he was the new quarterback for welfare reform.

Adding to the appearance that the compromise

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might be a breakthrough resulting in legislative action was the appearance of Assembly Speaker Willie L. Brown Jr., D-San Francisco, who was in a good mood.

"The governor, I understand, is now talking about having you replaced with Agnos on the toxics reorganization plan," Brown told Swoap.

A Deukmejian administration toxics reorganization plan drafted by Swoap was rejected by the Assembly last month and is being resubmitted.

An important Senate player in welfare legislation, Bill Greene, D-Los Angeles, also was at the news conference to add his endorsement.

Agnos said he hopes to get the legislation enacted next year. The Legislature, after a month-long recess beginning at the end of the week, only has another month in session this year.

The reform program would be phased in over a three-year period, with San Diego and a group of San Joaquin Valley counties presumably among the early entries because they have a head start.

Agnos said the proposal, called Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN), contains parts of earlier proposals by the Deukmejian administration, Garamendi and Sen. Diane E. Watson, D-Los Angeles.

The program is mandatory for all recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children who are single parents with no children 6 or younger. In two-parent families, the program is mandatory for the main wage earner.

Officials said this covers a third of AFDC recipients. More than 170,000 persons are expected to participate, including some volunteers.

The full range of benefits would continue: cash, Medi-Cal and food stamps. Women would receive child care, transportation and even clothing if needed.

After an initial screening, recipients could receive remedial education or English courses or an exemption if, for example, time is needed to recover from a death in the family.

A three-week job search supervised by the Employment Development Department could be preceded by "job club" training in job-hunting techniques.

Participants would not have to take a job if it pays less than 185 percent of the welfare grant.

If work is not found, the recipient goes on to a variety of education and training programs. Up to two years of higher education is covered.

In addition to on-the-job training, there also would be vocational training and programs in which welfare money goes to employers who hire recipients.

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