

Clinton seeks 2-year limit on welfare



Executive order planned if Congress doesn't approve bill

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WASHINGTON — President Clinton's conditional pledge Tuesday to deny aid to welfare recipients who don't find jobs after two years drew skepticism from Gov. Pete Wilson and outrage from state welfare advocates who called it election-year pandering.

Clinton said he would issue an executive order placing a two-year time limit on some welfare payments if the GOP-led Congress didn't deliver welfare reform this year. "We'll say to welfare recipients, within

two years you will be expected to work and earn a paycheck, not draw a welfare check," Clinton, speaking by satellite hookup, told a National Governors' Association meeting in Puerto Rico.

In an earlier address to the governors, Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole had questioned Clinton's willingness to support welfare reform and charged that the administration has frustrated efforts by states to move on their own by delaying approval of needed federal waivers.

Bruce Reed, Clinton's chief adviser on welfare, said the proposed executive order
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Wilson
Seeks greater flexibility in administering welfare programs

Critics shred Clinton's welfare plan

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is "just a little more leverage" on Congress, which is considering legislation that could cut welfare rolls by up to 40 percent.

Votes are scheduled this week in the House and Senate on measures that would end current federal welfare guarantees and provide states with block grants to fund their own programs.

Clinton's proposal would affect participants in the federal Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program. Reed said that if states moved every eligible welfare recipient into that program, 60 percent of the country's adult welfare population would be affected by Clinton's proposal.

344,000 eligible in state

In California, 344,000 adults are eligible for the state's equivalent of the JOBS program. But while Wilson — like many governors — has called for greater flexibility in administering welfare programs, his press officer questioned the timing of Clinton's announcement.

"Is this an election-year conversion?" asked Sean Walsh, press secretary to Wilson, who has cut the average welfare grant to a family of three by 14 percent since taking office. "Why not just block-grant all of welfare to states and allow us to enact fundamental reform?"

Since Wilson became governor in 1991, the average family of three has seen its monthly welfare check dwindle from \$694 to \$594. Californians can now make more at minimum-wage jobs than at welfare counters.

Grinne Chee, a California Department of Social Services official, said the state is seeking federal approval to enact further cuts and would prefer a wholesale revamping of the system than Clinton's proposal Tuesday.

"It's encouraging, but we've heard it before," Chee said. "We need relief from federal mandates to implement our system that will make lives better for families and children who've already hit rock bottom."

'Sound bites'

Casey McKeever, directing attorney for the Western Center on Law and Poverty in Sacramento, called Tuesday's wrinkle in the nation's 2-year-old welfare de-



President Clinton speaks by satellite television hookup to the National Governors' Association meeting in Puerto Rico on Tuesday.

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bate little more than "sloganeering and sound bites."

"You can't do this on the cheap," said McKeever. "It's got to be done with education and training and child care and job creation. You don't pull the rug out from people and just expect people to float, because a lot of them won't float."

Clinton's pledge, announced just four months before the election, appears calculated to protect him politically if Congress fails to pass welfare legislation or if he decides to veto what it does pass.

"I far prefer a bill passed by Congress and I know you do,

too," said Clinton. But "one way or another we will make work and responsibility the law of the land, but we want a good welfare reform bill."

Clinton has twice vetoed Republican welfare proposals and threatened to veto the current legislation when GOP leaders attacked a proposed overhaul of Medicaid, the state-federal health insurance program for the poor.

Dole had backed Medicaid overhaul as part of the welfare bill. However, last week congressional Republicans indicated they would remove the Medicaid provisions, which Clinton said made a welfare bill more possible.

WELFARE OVERHAUL

Congress is considering welfare-reform legislation to end the 60-year-old guarantee of aid to the disadvantaged. The legislation would:

- Give states vast new flexibility to design their own systems and establish their own rules. Every adult would have to go to work within two years or lose benefits.
- End the federal guarantee of assistance to eligible families with children. Limit benefits to five years. States could exempt up to 20 percent of families from the lifetime cutoff.
- Allow states to prohibit payments to unmarried teen-age mothers, and require teen moms to stay in school and live with an adult.
- Require states to bar additional payments to women who conceive additional children while on welfare, unless the state passes legislation opting out of the provision.
- Reduce the growth in the food-stamp program by \$28.4 billion over six years, limit the deductions for shelter costs, and allow some states to receive food stamps as an optional block grant.
- Bar aid to most non-citizens.
- Overhaul rules for the Supplemental Security Income program to cut off payments to children with less-severe disabilities.

Source: Mercury News wire services

But Clinton is still concerned by provisions in the Republican bill that would deny social services to legal immigrants and limit benefits to some hard-pressed recipients.

Kevin Aslanian, executive director of the Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, called Clinton's latest proposal cowardly and immoral.

"They attack babies and families and do nothing about corporate welfare," Aslanian said. "There may be some brave souls who will fight this, but most of the people in Congress care about only one thing: their next re-election."

Vanessa Gallman of the Mercury News Washington bureau contributed to this report.