

**Welfare System Remarks of Robert B. Carleson, as published in *Government IS the Problem: Memoirs of Ronald Reagan's Welfare Reformer***

If I were asked, as a Devil's Advocate, to design an efficient system for the redistribution of the nation's income, I would agree that such a plan must be universal, simple, and uniform. It must be an engine fueled by the political dynamics of a representative democracy. This system would really require only three main characteristics:

1. **Universal eligibility.** All individuals and families with income below an established minimum would be eligible for the program. Categorical tests for eligibility on the basis of age, blindness, disability, widow or orphan status, unemployment, etc. would be jettisoned. [**So-called "broad-based categorical eligibility" is now in place and has been actively promoted by the Obama administration as a means to expand the number of individuals covered by various federal welfare programs.**]
2. **Benefit levels set by Congress.** A national income redistribution system would require that benefits be established for the nation as a whole. At present, welfare benefit levels (except for food stamps) are set by the states.
3. **Cash benefits.** Benefits would be in the form of cash, because people have a limited capacity to consume food, clothing, or housing but an unlimited capacity to consume cash. [**Benefits are now provided through electronic benefit cards – the equivalent of cash – and often sold on the Internet or the black market for cash.**]

Two other elements would be useful but not necessary. One would be that the system be administered entirely by a federal agency, and the other that there be no work requirement. A work requirement implies a quid pro quo and would be replaced by "work incentives," a euphemism which really means "no work requirement."

The system could work with "state administration" as long as the federal government set all standards and rules, reducing the states to the status of clerks.

Consider what would happen next, if such an income redistribution mechanism were set in place. The political dynamics of representative democracy would accelerate the redistribution process. Irresistible pressures would build on Congress to increase the centrally-set benefit levels. Millions of additional persons would receive cash benefits. More pressure then would build for more benefits from a greater number of constituents. Additional benefits would be added, and on and on, until most Americans would be receiving cash benefits. Eventually, the nation's economic system would collapse.<sup>i</sup>

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Robert B. Carleson, *Government IS the Problem: Memoirs of Ronald Reagan's Welfare Reformer* (Alexandria, VA: American Civil Rights Union, 2010), pp. 58-59.