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Welfare Reform That Can Work

To the Editor:

In *Welfare Hysteria* (Op-Ed, Nov. 14), Charles Murray misses the point on why President Clinton needs to veto the welfare reform legislation now in House-Senate conference.

Through the legislation, Congress wants to cut spending on poor children to help reduce the debt. Much of the debt was created by supply-side economics. The debt rose from \$800 billion in 1981 to \$3 trillion in 1991 partly as a result of huge tax breaks to the rich and tax increases on the poor. Child poverty increased by over 20 percent in the 1980s.

Yet the Congressional debt reduction plan of which reduced child poverty spending is a part is based on more supply-side economics, which will make the rich still richer and the poor still poorer. This helps fulfill the prophecy of the 1968 Kerner Commission of two nations, one black, one white, separate and unequal.

The key to reducing child poverty is training parents for employment, placing them in real jobs and providing child care while they work. None of the state plans come close to doing this for all those eligible.

None of the state devolution schemes acknowledge how the job training program for high-risk inner-city young people, the Job Training Partnership Act created in the 1980s, has failed, based on scientific evaluations.

We know what works. There are scientifically evaluated models upon which to build a solid system that links education, training, placement, economic development to generate jobs and inner-city financing through community banking.

Those models, the heart of real welfare reform, include mentoring in safe havens after school, which has been popularized by the Carnegie Corporation; the Ford Foundation's Quantum Opportunities Program, and the Argus Community's program in the South Bronx to train young adults to rehabilitate inner-city homes, which is being replicated by the Labor Department.

Federal funding is needed, but day-to-day program operations should be devolved not to the states, but much further, to these grass-roots, democracy-recreating, community-based successes.

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