

Editorials & Comments

Politics Of The Food Stamp Program

By Hoyle H. Martin, Sr.
Post Staff Writer

There are 41,500 individuals -- 12,000 families -- in Mecklenburg County that face the possibility of having considerably less food on their dinner tables in the near future. This will be the direct result of a two-fold attack upon the food stamp program based on real and alleged abuses.

President Ford plans to change the food stamp program legislation by executive order effective on or about June 1. He has ordered the

Secretary of Agriculture to prepare regulations that would eliminate 5.3 million people from the program and cut out the benefits of an additional 5 to 6 million more.

Furthermore, the President's regulations call for ending all emergency food stamps which will result in a minimum waiting period of 45 days; requiring all recipients to pay 30 per cent of their income (currently 24 per cent) for food stamps; and reducing the eligibility income level to the poverty level of \$5,050 for a

family of four. The latter two regulations will be particularly damaging to the program because recipients will have less income for other necessities and the poverty income level is a poor eligibility basis because it neither allows for the 12 to 24 lag in inflation nor the needs of those just above the poverty income line.

While the President is making these moves, the Senate Agriculture Committee is preparing to send to the Senate floor new food stamp legislation that is also punitive but not as harsh as Ford's new regulations. These nearly simultaneous

moves by the executive and legislative branches of the federal government could result in two major program changes within a few months. Such a callous lack of coordination on their part will lead to massive mismanagement and confusion. Such a situation would certainly have political overtones and in no way relate to truly serving the interest of those in need.

Furthermore, if the intent of these curbs on the food stamp program by our law makers is to give the impression in this election year that the government is seriously attempting to cut the federal budget, reduce waste, and halt abuses, then a new milestone in good government will have been reached; however, there

is little reason to believe that this has happened. The facts, in effect, do not agree with what the President and other politicians want the voters to believe. For example, a historic study (1972) conducted by Senator William Proxmire's (D-Wis.) Joint Economic Committee concluded by preliminary data that more than \$63 billion in subsidies (welfare capi-

talism) flows from the federal government into private hands each year--about 1/4 of the total federal budget. It is important to note that THIS SUM DOES NOT INCLUDE SOCIAL WELFARE PAYMENTS OF ANY KIND NOR KNOWN COSTS FOR WASTE.

We could note numerous examples to illustrate the attitude of the Nixon-Ford administration on waste and abuse. A case in point was Ernie Fitzgerald, a cost analyst in the office of the Secretary of the Air Force. An efficiency expert, Fitzgerald testified before Senator Proxmire's committee that the taxpayers' money was being wasted by billions of dollars on a number of large military weapons and the cost-overruns were shocking high and needless. His testimony caused Senator Proxmire to note that the U.S. weapons acquisition system is "a kind of welfare system for the military brass and the Department of Defense bureaucracy... and the top aerospace and munitions manufacturers..." Fitzgerald's reward for his concern with efficiency in government was to have his job abolished by the Secretary of the Air Force and be made a target for character assassination. An even greater tragedy is that such waste and abuses continue to occur in our nation's capital.

A fourth reason for concern about these proposals to significantly alter the existing food stamp program is the fact that the program is considerably more than charity. Food stamps have in effect been a prime motivator in boosting our sagging economy. An Agriculture Department study reveals that every dollar in food stamps given to the people in need produces over \$6 in new business activity. Department economists calculate that the "multiplier effect" of \$2.7 billion in food stamp bonuses given in 1974 produced \$16.8 billion in new business activity. The Ford Administration has refused to date to make this report public because it refutes his politically motivated arguments for tampering with the food stamp program and his masquerade about efficiency in government.

Finally, while we do not condone the exploiting of the food stamp program by recipients or potential recipients, evidence appears to indicate that the degree of such exploitation is quite insignificant when compared with the needs of those who would be affected by any substantial change in the existing legislation as currently planned.

President Ford and the Congress need to get on with the business of improving services to the poor instead of playing political games with the hungry in exchange for votes from those who may not be so hungry.



REPORT FROM Washington

An Energy Crisis Forewarned

by Jim Martin
9th District, N.C.

The Shah of Iran is trying to tell this country something about itself. Many people have forgotten that this country is still heavily dependent on foreign energy sources to maintain a healthy economy and the way of life many of us enjoy. His Eminence, the Shah has not forgotten.

The Shah says if the United States Congress imposes an embargo on arms sales to his country, "we can hurt you as badly if not more so than you can hurt us." The same is true with other Oil Producing and Exporting Countries (O.P.E.C.). We all recognize he is talking about imported oil which makes up 40 percent of what we use each day. The Shah sells us a substantial portion of that imported oil. It is important to remember that the bulk of the imported oil comes from the Middle East. The Shah said action by his country against the United States could go beyond using oil as a weapon. In an interview

with U.S. News and World Report, the Shah said "We can create trouble for you in this region (Middle East)." He added what many of us already know, "America's credibility is not too high. You look rather like a crippled giant."

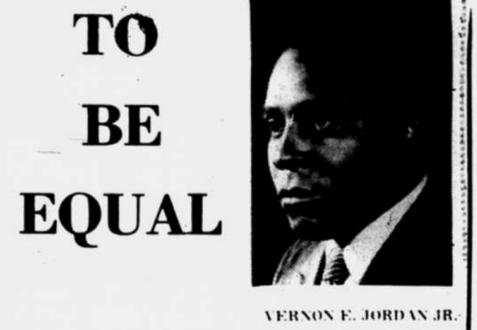
I hope the Shah's straight forward remarks serve as a reminder to the Congress that the energy crisis and long gas lines are not just a thing of the past, but could become the future. With conditions in the Mid East constantly simmering, we will be faced with the prospect of another oil embargo as long as oil is a weapon that can be used against us. The Shah has reminded us that oil can be a potent weapon. Yet, we are hardly any closer to energy independence than we were in the winter of 1973-74.

Congress has had 2 1/2 years to decide how to meet this country's future energy needs. Yet, little progress has been made. If anything, Congress has set a course that will cut oil production in America, leaving us more dependent on

O.P.E.C.

We are told Saudi Arabia will ask the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) for a freeze on world oil prices. The Saudis say any price increase now would impede world-wide economic recovery and would reduce demand for oil. However, they have stressed their desire to work within OPEC and warned their pricing position could change over "political matters". We can assume they are talking about any new Arab-Israeli conflict.

The oil picture is not food. After a brief decline oil imports have risen to a higher level than before the 1973 embargo. Our domestic price and tax policy discourages any increase in exportation and drilling for oil and natural gas in our own country and off our coasts. Natural gas exploration has all but come to a halt as our supplies dwindle more each year. In contrast to the profitable 1974 period, when drilling rigs could not be built fast enough for oil companies.



The South's New Face

I recently spoke to the Joint Session of the South Carolina General Assembly. It was the first such invitation to a leader of a civil rights organization.

It seems that every moment that day was filled with symbolic meaning. I left my room at a hotel named for Wade Hampton. Hampton was the leader of the white Redeemer faction that wrested control of the state from its integrated leadership in Reconstruction times and helped build the post-Civil War era of white supremacy.

Across the street, on the grounds of the Capitol, I saw a statue of "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman, leader of the segregationists in Congress and long-time U.S. Senator from South Carolina.

The first thing I noticed once inside the lobby of the Capitol was a statue of John C. Calhoun, The South Carolinian who has the leader of the pro-slavery forces in the country before the Civil War.

To my left, was an inscription in the marble facade of the side wall of the lobby. It was the declaration of secession that took South Carolina out of the Union in 1860 and ignited the Civil War.

I gave my address standing under three flags -- the state flag, the U.S. flag, and the flag of the Confederacy!

In the audience, made up of members of both houses of the legislature, were thirteen black representatives, more than at any time since Reconstruction days.

Also in that body were many legislators whose service dates back to the bitter days of the fifties and sixties, among them men who cried "Never," and who tried in every way possible to retain the old segregation system of that oppressed black people.

And in the gallery were citizens viewing the preceding, including some integrated classes of school children.

All of this is significant, but perhaps even more significant was the warm reception I received, a reception that went well beyond traditional southern graciousness and hospitality. There was a willingness to listen to views that not too long ago would have landed a black person in a lot of trouble.

The session was followed by lunch at the Governor's mansion -- an integrated affair that led me to reflect on the fact that at one time no black person would be allowed into the mansion, much less to sit down and break bread with the white power structure. And I thought too, that at one time it would be unthinkable that the Governor of South Carolina would be a Republican.

I next visited an industrial plant in Columbia that had an integrated workforce, blacks in managerial and professional positions, and a policy of sharing the work in the recession instead of just laying off the most recently hired workers.

Whether it does in fact do so depends largely on whether it can root out the vestiges of racism and whether white people in the region can overcome their past prejudices to cooperate with blacks in winning programs beneficial to both races.

It's a long, long road to racial equality and we're nowhere near its end, but a good start has been made in the very region that once was locked into the worst traditions of racism. That in itself, represents progress.

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as i see it

Ford Jeopardizes Food Stamp Program

by Gerald O. Johnson

President Ford in an attempt to correct the inadequacies of the food stamp program, will more than likely cause more harm than good.

The President proposes to put into law his program by this summer. The program has proposed as part of its stipulations that (1) No one with income above the official poverty line will receive food stamps. (2) 33 percent of an individual's income must go towards payments for food stamps.

Individuals currently in the food stamp program pay 22 percent of their incomes for food stamps. The President's program while attempting to exclude those individuals abusing the current food stamp program will also exclude many individuals in dire need of food stamps.

By stipulating that no one with income over the official poverty level will receive food stamps the President has categorized an entire income bracket. Two people with similar incomes have quite different needs. Furthermore the poverty line is merely an economic yard stick and has little to do with reality. To try to use such a measurement as a means of affecting peoples lives is hardly characteristic of a national leader.

As if this isn't enough the President also proposes to raise the cost of food stamps for those eligible to receive them by 11 percent. The elderly, minorities, poor whites, and unemployed will suffer from these measures drastically. The President should re-assess his program from a people point-of-view instead of the dollar point-of-view.

Because this is an election year it is understandable that



Gerald O. Johnson

The President is going all out to do deeds to win votes. But I think he has gone out on a limb that is bound to break with this absurd program. If he was so all keyed up on saving the country money, why not start by closing the several hundred obsolete ar-

my bases we have around the country. Instead of pouring billions into something for nothing, why not re-channel this money.

Moreover, why not re-amp the fall-out program we currently have for emergencies. Millions of dollars are spent yearly to keep up fall out shelters for a Hydrogen bomb attack, while the next war is guaranteed to be a nuclear one. No fall out shelter will help you in a nuclear war.

Or, why not re-establish the medicare program where billions of dollars are being mis-handled by fraudulent laboratories.

Even better, why not do away with un-needed bureaucracies that remain in Washington. It has been officially reported that there are more obsolete government departments than there are functional departments. There are departments that duplicate fun-

ctions.

Why not give the President and the Congress a pay cut instead of a pay raise. If we paid them what they were worth we could balance the budget.

The government is the biggest problem this country now faces. This massive body of do nothings introduces programs to help the taxpayers but never organizes the program well enough for proper administration. Hence, people who shouldn't benefit from such programs do benefit.

Then when an election year comes around the President in order to be impressive, ends up hurting the do-gooders.

If President Ford really wanted to save money, he needn't look far beyond his White House Gates.

CONGRATULATIONS UNCC BASKETBALL TEAM

Nothing could be finer than being a 49er about now. Especially if you are a basketball fan. The well disciplined well coached UNCC Basketball Team has captured the hearts and souls of Charlotteans as well as much of the country.

Though the team has cost me a lot of money by doing as well as they did I must say I was quite proud of their calibre of play.

This should prove to those that I have argued with before that the way to get publicity to your school is through a good sports program. Money invested properly in this area will go a long way in promoting other programs.

Again, I would like to take the time to congratulate the UNCC Basketball team from the entire Post staff. I must go and practice my free throwing now...Rock Easy.