

# CONGRESS' WELFARE BILLS HAVE STATES WORRIED; LAWMAKERS SAY PROVISIONS MAY COST A BUNDLE

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## **Body**

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Missouri Political Correspondent **STATES SAY** they'd like to be considered in **Congress' welfare** reform measure, because they could get stuck with paying the **bill**.

Leaders of the National Conference of **State** Legislatures **said** Monday they were in constant touch with House and Senate conferees on the final form of the federal **welfare** reform **bill** being written.

About 4,600 legislators, staff aides and people associated with **state** legislators are attending the national conference's annual meeting at America's Center. The meeting runs through Wednesday.

**State** Sen. James J. Lack, R-N.Y., and **state** Rep. Jane Campbell, D-Ohio, **said** the conference had serious concerns about some **provisions** of **welfare bills** passed this month by the House and Senate. Lack is conference president, and Campbell is immediate past president.

Lack **said** a **provision** denying **welfare** benefits to legal immigrants would be "a nightmare" for New York and other **states** with high immigrant populations. He **said** the New York Constitution required giving **welfare** benefits to immigrants, and if **Congress** banned them, New York would have to pick up a potential \$ 1 billion in **costs**.

Nationwide, banning federal **welfare** benefits to legal immigrants could result in shifting \$ 11 billion in **costs** to **states**, a conference report **said**.

Campbell **said** the federal **bill** called for it to take effect Oct. 1. She **said** the **states** wanted the effective date delayed until Oct. 1, 1997, to give them time to adjust. Most **state** legislatures will be out of session after Oct. 1 this year, she **said**.

Although different in many respects, the House and Senate **bills** agree in setting a two-year limit on **welfare** benefits without the beneficiary being employed, and a five-year lifetime limit on **welfare** benefits. They would give **states** block grants, eliminating waivers **states** now must obtain to install their own **welfare** requirements.

Campbell **said** 36 **states** already had set time limits, and 24 **states** had set work requirements. But the conference staff reported that in only two **states** - Vermont and Florida - have laws been in effect long enough for the time limit to expire. So far, only eight families in Florida have been cut off, according to conference data.

Campbell **said** that if children were abused in a family cut off from benefits, they could be put in foster care, but this also has not happened.

Sen. James L. Mathewson, D-Sedalia, president pro tem of the Missouri Senate, **said** Missouri had passed a law in 1994 providing child care and job training for **welfare** mothers, but setting no time limit for them to get a job.

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"There are 26,000 less people on welfare now," Mathewson said. "One of the reasons is the economy is good. For the present fiscal year, the cost of aid to families with dependent children is \$ 10 million less."

But he said Missouri had to get 19 separate waivers from the federal government to carry out its welfare changes. "If they would just give us 75 to 80 percent of the money we're getting now and leave us alone, we'll deliver a lot better system than they'll ever dream up," he said.

Mathewson said he had worked out a system in which applicants for food stamps in Sedalia were sent to the nearby Tyson Foods plant to get a job. He said, "The word went around, 'Don't go sign up for food stamps. They'll make you go pick chickens at Tyson.' "

But federal law has a provision that if an applicant is denied a job because of an employer requirement, food stamps cannot be cut off. Mathewson said Tyson had a drug test, so new advice hit the street: "Go shoot up, and then you don't have to take the job," Mathewson said.

He said he hoped the federal welfare bill would allow Missouri to use its own discretion on dealing with this problem.

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