

Chapter 6

Rethinking TANF as if Mothers Matter

The welfare reform law passed by a majority-Republican Congress and signed by a Democratic president was set to expire on October 1, 2002. As this deadline approached, familiar mantras about wage work and marriage guided both Republican and Democratic approaches. Antiracist, antipoverty feminists countered with arguments from both theory and practice—from ideas about equality and from the experiences of poverty and welfare. A grassroots movement for welfare rights rose in many parts of the United States and allied with feminist policy wonks who sought justice in and through a strengthened safety net. At rallies, briefings, and congressional hearings, mothers with firsthand experience in the new welfare system, along with allies from universities and think tanks, testified to TANF's deficits, including: "diversion" programs that work to keep mothers from enrolling in TANF in the first place; "family caps" that deny support to children born after their mothers begin receiving aid; sanctions that punish whole families for a mother's failure to comply with the rules of welfare reform; pressure to marry; and arguably compulsory child neglect in a system that demands work outside the home without guaranteeing child care. Feminist social justice advocates worked to explain TANF's shortcomings to policy makers and potential allies and then to elaborate correctives that would enhance the well-being and dignity of mothers and their children.

One important effort to articulate a different picture of the world than the one that was woven into the TANF program began in October 1999. Its architects, a group that included the authors of this book, were veterans of the fractious politics of the middle 1990s. Meeting under the banner of the Women's Committee of 100/Project 2002, feminist scholars, writers, and

other professionals had a relatively long-term goal of preparing for the coming debate over congressional reauthorization of the 1996 law due in 2002. But their first goal was to articulate the fundamentals of a new public philosophy and policy. While politicians in both parties viewed declining welfare participation under TANF as a sign of the program's success, members of the Women's Committee of 100 and other social justice feminists saw the decline as the inevitable effect of the program's stringent and discouraging rules. While politicians designed two-parent "family formation" incentives as the next step in welfare reform, the Women's Committee of 100 and allies decried efforts to condition the well-being of mothers and children on the presence of a male breadwinner in the family. The Women's Committee of 100 spelled out an alternative next step in welfare reform, which asked policy makers to redesign policy to advance poor mothers' economic security and equality while allowing them to choose a mix of endeavors, from caregiving to education to labor market employment.

The Women's Committee of 100 was allied with those Democrats who continued to dissent from the supposed welfare consensus. Thanks in part to the work of political scientist Gwendolyn Mink and her mother, Congresswoman Patsy Takemoto Mink, the efforts of feminist scholars and dissident politicians ran alongside one another and blended together. The positions articulated by the Women's Committee of 100 ultimately helped generate H.R. 3113, the major effort in Congress to rewrite TANF along race- and class-conscious feminist lines.¹

Members of the Women's Committee of 100 began discussing TANF reauthorization in 1999, with an eye to conditioning the program's continuation on fundamental changes. We saw TANF as degrading and oppressive to low-income single mothers—disproportionately women of color—caught in the vise of meeting strict work requirements while also shouldering full-time responsibility for their children. We were determined to stanch the flood of racialized misogyny the TANF law codified and required, and eager to restore the support for single parents' caregiving work provided by the old welfare system, although without the old system's prescribed gender roles. Further, we understood TANF to be inseparable from other perils to women's reproductive rights and to all people's autonomy in their sexual, romantic, and parenting activities. And we believed that if they were preserved in a reauthorized TANF statute, the spurious, even fabulist, premises of mid-1990s welfare reform would bedevil future policy efforts to support low-income wage workers and caregivers. The racialized and mother-hating specter of

the “welfare queen” would continue to stalk every corner of the domestic state.

The Women’s Committee of 100 offered what it titled “An Immodest Proposal” (reproduced in the Appendix), which broadened the emerging conversation about TANF reauthorization to propose replacing the program with more reliable income support. In place of a maximum five years of assistance for impoverished parents and children, we called for a caregivers’ allowance, or “guaranteed income for caregivers of minor children and other dependent family members requiring sustained care.”² This allowance was modeled on the Survivors Insurance portion of the Social Security system, which provides an income to the minor children of deceased workers who are covered by Social Security, as well as to surviving spouses while they are raising those children. Recipients of Survivors Insurance, typically single mothers and their children, receive benefits that are automatic rather than discretionary and are federally rather than locally administered. As such, the availability of Survivors Insurance does not depend on the fiscal whims of individual states and benefit levels do not fluctuate with election cycles. In addition to being reliable and regular, Survivors Insurance is also far more generous than welfare ever has been. Unlike welfare recipients, survivors are not subject to regulation, surveillance, and sanctions in exchange for benefits.

Members of the Women’s Committee of 100, who included professors of social work, philosophy, history, and political science, drew on our own research to formulate a proposal that recognized the time and energy it takes to care for family and community members. “Women perform the bulk of caring work for children, elders, and dependent persons,” “An Immodest Proposal” reminded, “both within their own homes and as paid employees. Our economic system both undervalues caregiving work when it is performed in the labor market and penalizes caregivers when they work outside the labor market.”³ “When poor caregivers meet these hardships, they face destitution,” the proposal continued. “When middle class caregivers encounter them, they become vulnerable to poverty for the first time.”⁴ Pointing to the burdens of poverty that disproportionately befall women of color, we insisted that because “poverty in the United States is not color-blind,” poverty policy must resolve to end the racialized gender distribution of poverty and inequality.⁵

“An Immodest Proposal” demanded respect for the work (mostly) women perform when they care for their families. It also recognized the participa-

tion of many women in waged work, including low-income single mothers propelled into the labor market by welfare policy. We opposed the grievously poor compensation many waged workers receive and the parallel withdrawal of public support to parents who cannot opt out of unwaged caregiving. “To replace TANF,” we wrote, “we propose a set of policies that will allow women to choose between performing caregiving themselves or purchasing high-quality services for those who depend upon them for care.”⁶ We sought to improve waged work as well as the treatment of unwaged parents, emphasizing policy options such as shortening the standard work week, ensuring affirmative action to reduce sexual and racial disparities in access to decent jobs, widening the availability of higher education, and creating a universal system of unemployment insurance.

During the course of 2000, the Women’s Committee of 100 circulated “An Immodest Proposal,” made it accessible on our website, and developed specific ideas for TANF reauthorization based on its principles. In the spring of 2000, the Welfare Made a Difference Campaign articulated TANF reform ideas that put the two groups in conversation. The NOW-LDEF BOB (Building Opportunities Beyond Welfare) Coalition gathered evidence, anecdotes, and policy recommendations that further enriched the landscape of legislative possibility.

But TANF reform was a backburner issue during the national elections of 2000, as both parties proclaimed that welfare reform had been a success.⁷ Occasionally, elements of the anti-welfare project grabbed attention in presidential politics, as when candidate Al Gore supported continuing, even expanding, funds for overtly religious organizations to provide welfare-to-work programs and rehabilitative services under the TANF program.⁸ Triangulating Republican George W. Bush’s faith-based vision for social services,⁹ the Democratic presidential campaign derided the “hollow secularism” of fellow Democrats who opposed allowing religious groups to use public funds for welfare services. Gore, still in the throes of “New Democratic” antiliberalism, seemed little concerned that religious grantees under what was known as “charitable choice” might refuse to hire LGBT people, or people of faiths different from their own, or women who became mothers without the sacrament of marriage—or that their untested, moralistic programs might cause participants harm.¹⁰

Notwithstanding support for the 1996 welfare paradigm at the highest echelons of both political parties, enforcement of that paradigm sparked a resurgence of welfare rights activism around the country.¹¹ One of the more

visible groups was the Kensington Welfare Rights Union (KWRU) in Philadelphia, a coalition of poor and homeless people founded in 1991. KWRU gained a local reputation for persistent attention to the otherwise hidden congeries of poor people and substandard housing in major cities. Under the leadership of a charismatic welfare recipient named Cheri Honkala, KWRU successfully squatted in publicly owned buildings to gain shelter for its members, and used the power of the group to make mass demands on behalf of people who were threatened with the loss of their benefits.¹²

KWRU organized and led the first major march on the Republican National Convention of 2000, in Philadelphia. The unsanctioned March for Economic Human Rights brought between fifteen hundred and two thousand people within striking distance of the arena where the Republicans gathered. According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the city's major newspaper, the demonstration "streamed for 3 1/2 miles [and] included welfare-rights activists with children on their shoulders, disabled people in wheelchairs, mock plutocrats in top hats and tuxedos, anti-death-penalty crusaders, tattooed teenagers and younger protesters pierced in every facial orifice, and a few anarchists with their faces covered by black bandannas." One described the group's message: "In the richest country in the world, we ought to be able to put an end to poverty and homelessness."¹³ Honkala drew on the rhetoric of Latin American movements against totalitarianism in referring to impoverished Philadelphians as "people who have Disappeared in America and whose well-being is no longer part of the political agenda of either political party."¹⁴

Reform Through Reauthorization?

Soon after George W. Bush entered the White House, the legislative debate over TANF reauthorization sharpened on all sides. Antipoverty advocates and other progressives who had opposed the 1996 welfare law continued their policy conversations about TANF reauthorization, as well as occasional protest actions to draw attention to ongoing miseries of life under welfare reform. Masculinist and feminist ambitions for progressive TANF reauthorization diverged at key junctures, particularly when it came to the value of caregiving and to recognizing TANF as a racialized and gendered policy construct. In some ways the reauthorization debate was more challenging for progressive advocates than the fight against PRWORA had been. Where resistance to welfare reform in the mid-1990s had united progressives against PRWORA, reauthorization invited critics to design specific changes and to

weight those changes toward specific goals. Cracks in the anti-PRWORA coalition emerged as some liberals struggled to turn welfare into a support system for low-wage workers, while antipoverty feminists built on our intersectional analysis to seek a policy that simultaneously valued caregiving and individual autonomy, while ensuring fair wages and just conditions in the labor market.

In the halls of Congress, the mainstream debate began and ended with bipartisan self-congratulations for welfare reform's supposed success. In between rounds of celebration, mainstream partisans fought over specific new provisions designed to sustain or advance welfare reform's "success." Most Democrats and Republicans did not want to change the law fundamentally, but each side did seek to ratchet up the emphases of the 1996 law—with Republicans calling for more discipline, while Democrats fashioned more incentives. For Republicans following the agenda of self-described "compassionate conservative" George W. Bush, TANF fixes also involved expanding the role of faith-based groups in welfare service delivery, promoting marriage and fatherhood more vigorously, and strengthening work requirements. For many Democrats, TANF reauthorization was an opportunity to improve work supports and access to education, while reaffirming the work-ethical and promarital messages of the 1996 law.

Proponents of TANF policy tweaks and champions of fundamental policy change, alike, benefited from the availability by 2001 of empirical evidence on TANF's impacts and consequences. The key fact to which boosters of the policy pointed was the drop in the numbers receiving assistance: by 2001, TANF caseloads had declined by nearly half since the high under the old AFDC program.¹⁵ Countering welfare tropes, demographic data also demonstrated that the families who continued to receive the benefit were, in the main, neither large nor were they headed by teenage mothers; the average size of a family that received this government help was three (two children and, typically, a mother). The parent's average age was thirty-two.¹⁶ A summary of local studies of people who had left welfare found that the top two reasons people stopped receiving benefits were employment and violations of the rules.¹⁷ This indicated that a significant portion of the closed TANF cases were ones in which the families continued to need assistance. Of those who worked for wages after their aid was discontinued, the average hourly compensation was between \$5.50 and \$8.80 per hour, leaving what the authors of a Congressional Research Service report termed a "significant number" below the poverty threshold, still needing Medicaid for health care

and food stamps to meet basic needs.¹⁸ In self-reports, approximately half of former welfare recipients told researchers that “food did not last or they did not have money for more food at some time in the past year, either often or sometimes.”¹⁹

Conservative Republicans read their data to underscore the need for more systematic marriage promotion and for greater enforcement of the work ethic. Although the 1996 welfare statute declared marriage “the foundation of a successful society,” conservative critics argued that neither the national nor state governments had invested enough resources in attempting to change the marital lives of impoverished Americans. Robert Rector from the Heritage Foundation think tank led the way in arguing that welfare—the TANF program—hurt families by promoting destructive “norms and values,” rather than helping them by alleviating desperation. He argued further that “illegitimacy [was] . . . passed, like a virus, between generations”; that mothers who received TANF were “sit[ting] idly on the rolls” and should be pressured more to combine wage work with caregiving; and that Congress could comfortably cut the TANF appropriation by 10 percent.²⁰ Presenting their agenda in moral terms, conservatives such as Rector sought to strengthen elements of the TANF program as levers for enforcing the work ethic and marital family values among the poor. Work requirements served both as work-ethical discipline and as punishment for single mothers who failed to assimilate marital norms.

Republican heteromartial moralism was present in the White House as well as in Congress. President Bush arrived in Washington with a record of using welfare policy to transmit certain values associated with (Christian) “faith.” As governor of Texas, George W. Bush had developed such a strategy for social service delivery; as president, one of his earliest executive orders created a White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. A second expanded the so-called charitable choice provision of PRWORA, which allowed sectarian groups to provide services to poor people with public money. The expansion permitted a similar *mélange* of the public, private, and religious under the auspices of other government programs, in addition to those targeted at TANF participants.²¹ By April 2001, President Bush had promised \$200 million over five years to community and religious groups to promote fatherhood and heterosexual marriage. As the TANF debate came to a head in the winter of 2002, Bush proposed \$300 million per year for states to design and implement programs that would reduce nonmarital births and increase the percentage of children in married-couple families.²²

In the Democratic mainstream, the intellectual and policy legacies of the Clinton administration and Gore campaign tempered opposition to core Republican goals. Embedded in the decision of most Democrats to support welfare reform in the 1990s had been an embrace of the claims that marriage and labor market participation were single mothers' primary alternatives to poverty. Ending "welfare as we know it" had meant disengaging governmental support for the caregiving work of lone parents, instead directing such parents to seek economic survival through either marital coupling or wage earning. In the mainstream Democratic view, caregiving might count, but only as fully privatized marital work. And while government did have a role to play in reducing poverty, that effort should emphasize helping single mothers help themselves through the labor market, not mitigating needs when full-time, living wages are not achievable.

The narrowing of debate about poverty and gendered norms among Democrats had become stark. While some Democrats raised their voices against heightened work requirements, most did not refuse work requirements themselves; meanwhile, most Democrats also endorsed the idea of using at least a portion of public antipoverty funds for marriage promotion, or "family formation," instead of for poverty reduction. Wendell Primus, who had resigned from the Clinton administration in protest of PRWORA, helped lubricate liberal triangulation of the marriage agenda when he declared that "progressives should [not] be scared of this issue" because "we also believe in marriage and two-parent families."²³ The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), a liberal advocacy organization, created a Couples and Marriage Policy Resource Center under the direction of policy analyst Theodora Ooms, who developed CLASP's "marriage plus" agenda.²⁴ In congressional testimony, C. Eugene Steuerle, a senior fellow of a liberal-leaning think tank, the Urban Institute, admitted that there was no research to support the idea that tweaks in antipoverty programs could reverse long-term trends in marital or sexual behavior. But "independently from whether [they would] significantly affect behavior in a narrow sense," he believed the government should pursue them.²⁵

Can a Feminist Bill Become Law?

Against this tide, Congresswoman Mink drafted her proposal for TANF reauthorization. In close consultation with Gwendolyn Mink and leaders of feminist antipoverty groups such as NOW-LDEF, the Welfare Made a

Difference Campaign, and the Women's Committee of 100, Representative Mink formulated a bill intended to root out the racialized misogyny of the original TANF legislation, along with the law's impairments of mothers' rights and opportunities.²⁶ By the end of July 2001, the bill was nearly ready to be introduced. Representative Mink wrote to her colleagues in the House asking them to cosponsor it. She drew on the data on welfare "leavers" to argue that TANF had failed to alleviate family poverty or provide paths to economic security. Mink told her colleagues she intended to rewrite TANF's "purposes"—the preface enumerating justifications for the program—which had made single motherhood, teenage pregnancy, and nonmarital births the key social problems to be solved. She proposed "redefining [the TANF program's] foremost purposes as 1) providing assistance to families in need so that children can be raised in their own homes and 2) reducing poverty."²⁷ The most philosophically sweeping change in the bill was a new stipulation that mothers' caregiving work for their own disabled, sick, or pre-school-aged children should count as a "work activity" and thus satisfy TANF's work requirements.²⁸ This would restore to parental caregiving a status similar to the one it had in the "mothers' pension" that had been codified in the original Aid to Dependent Children provision of the Social Security Act of 1935. Mink's bill also counted education, from elementary through postsecondary, as a work activity, along with efforts to address certain barriers to employment, such as domestic violence, disability, or substance abuse.²⁹

The Mink bill, H.R. 3113, was comprehensive legislation that mirrored in scope the TANF program it was intended to reform. The programmatic changes outlined in H.R. 3113 were less ambitious than those recommended by the Women's Committee of 100; Representative Mink chose to build on the structure of the existing TANF program rather than trying to eliminate it and substitute a caregivers' allowance similar to the ones that some European countries provide. But the Mink bill rested on the same philosophical foundation as the Women's Committee of 100's "Immodest Proposal," the idea that citizenship links the duties of individuals to a positive governmental obligation to ensure a minimally decent family life irrespective of parents' earnings or marital status. Rescuing caregiving from the oblivion of the unseen and unvalued, both the Women's Committee of 100 and Congresswoman Mink defined the differential treatment of women based on their parenting choices and family arrangements as discrimination against mothers.³⁰ Financial cuts and welfare rules that set custodial parents up to fail were a manifestation of state-sanctioned misogyny and matriphobia,

Union Women, and many welfare rights groups, such as Welfare Made a Difference, Mothers on the Move, and the Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition.⁴⁴ A nationwide survey of voters found that a majority supported the Mink bill's idea that the key goal of TANF should be "moving people out of poverty," rather than, as in PRWORA, lowering the number receiving aid. Majorities, even of self-described conservatives and Republicans, wanted to enable more recipients to access education and training. Overall majorities thought that a good policy would count education and training as "work" and stop the clock toward the five-year time limit if participants followed all the program's rules.⁴⁵

H.R. 3113, the feminist legislative vehicle for TANF reauthorization, faced an extraordinarily steep climb in a Washington in which mainstream liberal advocates and researchers mused openly about increasing governmental support for *men's* workforce training to address women's poverty, and endorsed incentives to train poor people's intimate choices on creating male-headed families. So, even though 44 percent of the Democratic Caucus co-sponsored the bill and notwithstanding widespread support from antipoverty and feminist groups, the Democratic Party leadership in Congress ultimately chose to offer a much more conservative bill as the party's official alternative to Republican ideas for welfare reauthorization. The Democratic substitute did not notice, and so did not attempt to correct, the sex and gender scripts of the TANF program. Nor did it address the racial disparities in welfare experiences and impacts. And while it did seek opportunities for welfare mothers to prepare for jobs with family-sustaining wages, it did not acknowledge, let alone impute value to, the caregiving work parents perform raising children.

"Working Toward Independence"

The bill for TANF reauthorization that ultimately passed the House of Representatives was the Republican majority's version of proposals outlined by the Bush White House. In February 2002, the White House issued a report titled "Working Toward Independence," setting forth its plan to improve TANF. The report reviewed certain supposedly positive outcomes associated with the 1996 welfare law—primarily, the finding that fewer people were on the welfare rolls. It went on to enumerate proposals to promote waged work, marriage, and sexual abstinence by unmarried women and announced a more unforgiving approach to child support enforcement. The White House

proposal also called for changes in the food stamp program, outlining a work requirement for receipt of benefits along with a partial restoration of eligibility for legal immigrants.⁴⁶

In step with the Bush White House, Republicans in the House offered H.R. 4737, mandating TANF recipients' "universal engagement" with labor market work. It required states to place 70 percent of their TANF participants in work activities by 2007 (as compared to 50 percent under the 1996 law) and increased the hours of work required of each participant. It balanced these mandates somewhat with a modest increase in funding for child care.⁴⁷ In keeping with the drumbeat for stronger levers to control the intimate lives of poor women, the Republican House bill also added marriage and fatherhood promotion to the purposes of TANF and carved out programmatic spending to achieve these goals.⁴⁸ It left out changes advocated by recipients and social justice feminists, such as requiring states to support family or sexual violence survivors, recognizing caregiving work as work, and stopping the time limit clock for families that were in compliance with program rules.⁴⁹

The reauthorization debate reached the floor of the House of Representatives in May 2002. When the Democratic leadership chose not to bring the Mink TANF bill, H.R. 3113, up for consideration, Representative Mink tried to offer pieces of her larger bill as a series of individual amendments to the GOP bill, but the Rules Committee permitted only a limited number of amendments to be offered. The Democratic substitute to the Republican bill was introduced by Ben Cardin (D-Maryland), the ranking member of the House Ways and Means Committee subcommittee that had jurisdiction over the TANF program. Representative Mink and members of the Congressional Black Caucus refused to support Cardin's substitute. Gwendolyn Mink wrote dispiritedly to Jacqueline Payne of NOW-LDEF: "this week's effort at a tri-caucus protest [among the Black, Hispanic, and Progressive Caucuses] ha[s] turned into a p[atry]+black caucus final march. eddie bernice [Johnson, D-Texas], maxine [Waters, D-California], major [Owens, D-New York] and p went to [Democratic majority leader Richard] gephardt last night. he told them (essentially) that it's more important to hold onto the new dems than to accommodate progressives/people of color."⁵⁰

The battle between the Cardin substitute and the Republican bill inspired passionate debate.⁵¹ But it did not represent the same kind of philosophical contest that a debate between House Republicans and supporters of the Mink bill would have. The Cardin bill would have made no change in the time

limits or work requirements placed on states or individual caregivers, preferring the 1996 work participation targets to the heightened requirements the Republicans sought in 2002; would have raised the maximum allowable period for educational pursuits from twelve to twenty-four months; would have strengthened the expectation that states would screen TANF applicants for family violence histories and other barriers to employment but maintained the optional status of TANF's family violence provision; would have restored benefit eligibility to legal immigrants but maintained the deeming of sponsors' income to brake eligibility; would have retained the family cap as a permissible state option; would have increased child care funding above the Republican level but without restoring it as an entitlement for TANF participants; would have improved the procedural protections for participants at risk of sanctions; and would have created a "family formation fund" to promote the formation of two-parent families, reduce teen pregnancy, and help noncustodial parents be involved with their children.⁵² On May 16, House majorities defeated the Democratic substitute and passed the Republican bill, with mostly party-line votes on each.⁵³

In the U.S. Senate, where the Democrats had the slimmest of majorities, there was no full complement to the Mink bill for TANF reauthorization. Senators Paul Wellstone (D-Minnesota) and Jon Corzine (D-New Jersey) showed interest in aspects of the Mink bill but shied from embracing it as a whole.⁵⁴ Multiple Democratic bills emerged in the Senate to challenge various aspects of the House GOP plan and to add new elements, such as support for clients to develop financial literacy, to the TANF program. Only one of these, the Building Secure and Healthy Families Act, introduced by Senator Patty Murray, raised the issue of valuing familial caregiving by limiting work requirements for single custodial parents and counting as work parental care for a child with a serious health condition.⁵⁵ The uniqueness of the Murray bill on this point attested to the distance many Democrats had traveled from the New Deal's Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program, the whole point of which was to support familial caregiving, to the New Democrats' TANF, which disdained poor mothers' caregiving for their own children.⁵⁶

Although it was not as wide ranging, the Senate debate among Democrats over welfare reauthorization recalled their divisions in the middle 1990s. The chair of the Senate Finance Committee until Republicans retook the Senate in the 2002 elections was Max Baucus (D-Montana), who had voted for welfare reform in 1996. The Finance Committee had controlling

accurate” information from the Kennedy group letter to Baucus and Grassley, it also accommodated much of the gender agenda that at one time was associated with the “moral majority” wing of the Republican Party. This included “healthy marriage promotion” programs, up to 75 percent of whose costs would be paid by the federal government, publicly subsidized (although medically accurate) abstinence education, and a variety of initiatives to promote “responsible fatherhood,” including by directing employment and training resources specifically to male workers. The Finance Committee approved some of the key child support provisions from the House Republican bill, which made it easier to suspend the passports of men who were behind in payments and engage the IRS in garnishing their tax refunds. It did not make the Family Violence Option mandatory for states.⁶¹

The Democratic caucus in the Senate was not far from the Finance Committee on these issues. Senator Murray’s Building Secure and Healthy Families Act of 2002, which relaxed work requirements for certain caregivers and exempted from the time limit families caring for a seriously ill or disabled child or dependent adult, was the sole Democratic bill in the Senate to challenge the TANF paradigm. And even Murray did not try to turn the Family Violence Option into a mandate or counter the deafening calls to promote fathers’ role and punish fathers’ failures.⁶² Indeed, the fatherhood bandwagon had momentum, even on the Democratic side of the aisle: after the Finance Committee had drafted its bill, Senators Clinton, Bob Graham, and Joseph Lieberman asked Chairman Baucus to focus even more on “male responsibility and employment.” The senators wrote: “Increasing employment among low-income men is important in its own right, but it will also contribute to stronger families and better outcomes for children. In addition, increasing male employment increases the ability of non-custodial parents to pay child support.”⁶³

The Democratic Party was divided over assorted TANF specifics, although only to a limited degree over its gendered framework. The divisions, along with pressures from outside groups, ultimately thwarted a Senate consensus on how to reauthorize TANF in 2002. Perhaps all sides decided that they preferred to have welfare as an issue in their reelection campaigns rather than to have a compromise bill. This was, according to political scientist Hugh Heclo, the general pattern in welfare history, a rule whose primary modern exception had been passage of PRWORA of 1996.⁶⁴

If welfare reauthorization was not settled in 2002, the process allowed much senatorial activism to bubble up. In addition to the Baucus bill from

the Finance Committee, and Senator Murray's "Healthy Families" effort, Senators Wellstone and Corzine submitted the "Chance to Succeed" bill, Bayh and Carper turned their ideas into a bill, Senator Feingold offered a "Fair Treatment and Due Process Protection" bill, and Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-New Mexico) signed on to three different pieces of legislation, each amending and reauthorizing a different portion of welfare law.⁶⁵

Given the Democrats' bare majority in the Senate, the looming election that would tip the balance toward the GOP, and the focus of many senators on discrete pieces of TANF rather than on the framework as a whole, no welfare reauthorization bill passed the Senate in 2002. And so, officially, if not actually, the welfare reform law expired on September 30, 2002. Congress prolonged the TANF program through a short-term continuing resolution that left funding levels and requirements unchanged. When the short-term extension expired, the stalemate continued. Congress ultimately passed ten continuing resolutions, which enabled states and localities to keep their TANF programs afloat, until finally agreeing to Republican terms for reauthorization in February 2006. As enacted, TANF reauthorization made work requirements more onerous, made "marriage promotion" a patriarchalist boondoggle, and gave states latitude to redirect TANF funds from cash assistance for people to services by public and private, secular and sectarian, organizations.⁶⁶

Two progressive voices permanently exited the welfare debate in the fall of 2002. Just days before the anticlimactic agreement deferring legislative action on TANF until after the election, Representative Patsy Mink passed away in Honolulu, of viral pneumonia developed from chicken pox. The *New York Times* remembered her "as articulate and strong-willed, and willing to fight for causes large and small."⁶⁷ Less than a month later, on October 25, 2002, Paul Wellstone, the only senator with roots in antipoverty organizing—a friend of the Mink bill, though not a sponsor—died in a plane crash in Minnesota.⁶⁸