Senate Welfare Debate Opens on

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and Judith Havemann
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The welfare reform debate, which raced through the House on partisan fuel this winter, opened in the Senate yesterday on a more solemn, historic tone, ushered in by senators eager to note the import of transforming 60 years of social programs.

"We're at a constitutional moment," said Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.), ranking Democrat and former chairman of the Finance Committee, shortly after the panel began consideration of a Republican welfare bill. "I don't know of a better moment and I don't know of a better place for this sort of debate."

And Finance Committee Chairman Bob Packwood (R-Ore.) said it was "the first of the philosophical debates" over how to rewrite the nation's welfare system. "By any measure, we have spent money. We have attempted to run it at the federal level. But whatever we have attempted, we have not achieved."

Even with the general lines of support and opposition forming along party lines, the legislation offered by Packwood has already stirred up more opposition than the bill approved with lockstep precision by Republicans in the House.

Republican Govs. Christine Todd Whitman of New Jersey and George V. Voinovich of Ohio expressed serious reservations recently about whether they could cope financially under the Senate bill if their states went into a recession. Four conservative senators have threatened to oppose the bill on the Senate floor if
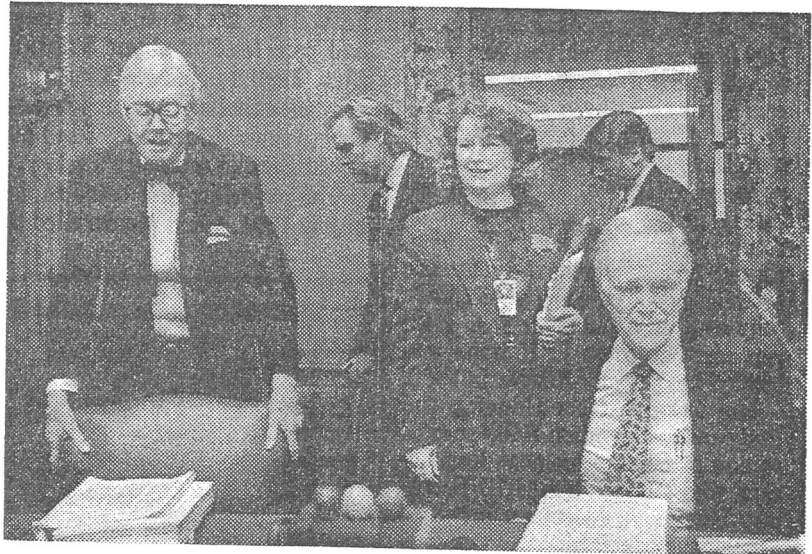
BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

Gathering at Finance Committee session are Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.), staff director Lindy L. Paull and Chairman Bob Packwood (R-Ore.).

it did not include provisions aimed at reducing out-of-wedlock births.

And even a handful of Republicans on the Finance Committee expressed their disagreement with parts of the Packwood bill, which faces a committee vote today.

The opposition is not likely to stop the Republican majority from approving the bill, which would replace Aid to Families with Dependent Children with a lump-sum payment to the states, granting them much more control over how to distribute aid to poor families.

Still, it was clear yesterday that senators from both parties recognized that if the Senate follows the House in ending the federal entitlement that has guaranteed aid to any eligible American, it would embrace an extraordinary shift in welfare policy.

"I didn't think it would be possible . . . to revamp the welfare system that has taken decades to create," said Sen. Don Nickles (R-Okla.), a supporter of the bill. That, he added, "would be a remarkable accomplishment."

Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) was the only Democratic member of the committee to express support for the legislation, calling it a "solid plan" that should be amended but that accomplished the goal of allowing states to take the lead on welfare. "We should forget party labels," he said.

But other Democrats voiced opposition in sometimes emotional terms.

Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun (D-Ill.) brought posters depicting destitute children in Thailand and 19th century Chicago. She said the photographs were "an important reminder

Solemn Note

of what happened to poor children before we had a social safety net."

Sen. John D. "Jay" Rockefeller IV (D-W.Va.) said the bill "essentially passes the buck" to the states and would hurt children.

"The law should not be about punishing children," he said, because "they have nothing to do with being born poor, just as I had nothing to do with being born otherwise."

Sen. Alan K. Simpson (R-Wyo.) countered these arguments, saying, "I haven't the slightest desire to do anything punitive to children, the aged . . . the disabled. Who does?"

But the fate of the bill may ride less on these arguments than on questions of funding. The Department of Health and Human Services has estimated it would save nearly $32 billion over five years, while the Finance Committee staff released a figure of $26 billion.

A provision considered by Packwood that would have cut into those savings was favored by some governors because it would have created a "rainy day grant fund" to help states when they experienced high population growth or entered a recession.

Both the House bill and Packwood's bill include a provision to loan states money under those circumstances. But Whitman and Voinovich have argued strongly that financially strapped states should not be forced to borrow funds and that instead, the federal government should set up a system of grants.

"We are disappointed in the Senate proposal," said Mike Dawson, press secretary to Voinovich. "We oppose it as currently written and will ask our senators to vote against it."

WELFARE FUNDING UNDER THE PACKWOOD BILL

Senate Finance Committee chairman's Bob Packwood's bill would freeze federal spending on welfare for five years, saving $32 billion compared with what would be spent under current law, according to the Clinton administration. Here are estimated reductions, in millions, that states would experience over five years.

California	$8,517
New York	4,526
Florida	1,896
Texas	1,862
Illinois	1,332
Michigan	1,175
Pennsylvania	1,048
Ohio	1,006
New Jersey	941
Massachusetts	855
Louisiana	734
U.S. average	668
North Carolina	631
Washington	589
Wisconsin	548
Virginia	496
Georgia	463
Maryland	421
Kentucky	415
Missouri	392
Minnesota	389
Indiana	382
Arizona	366
Mississippi	361
Alabama	336
Arkansas	330
Tennessee	311
Connecticut	307
Oregon	225
South Carolina	209
Colorado	206
Oklahoma	200
New Mexico	198
Kansas	191
Iowa	178
West Virginia	167
Hawaii	164
Rhode Island	149
Utah	117
District of Columbia	107
Nebraska	82
Idaho	81
Nevada	77
Maine	76
Alaska	70
Montana	48
Vermont	44
Delaware	41
New Hampshire	41
South Dakota	39
Wyoming	32
North Daokta	26

SOURCE: Department of Health and Human Services

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Arizona Gov. J. Fife Symington III (R) and Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles (D) have also complained that states with growing populations should not be forced to get by on a fixed level of federal funds for five years when other states are losing population.