

Social Security Number at Birth

Urged to Curb Welfare Abuses

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WASHINGTON, March 20—Representative Martha W. Griffiths, Democrat of Michigan, proposed today that every American baby be assigned a Social Security number at birth.

Earlier this month, the Senate Finance Committee aroused the wrath of civil libertarians by voting to require that each child be issued a social security card upon entering the first grade in order to crack down on so-called "welfare chiselers."

Mrs. Griffiths, a member of the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee, commended the Senate committee's action but said that it did not go far enough in closing possible avenues for welfare abuse.

She said that by the time a child entered school, his parents or other relatives may have applied for child welfare payments under five or six different names, thus receiving multiple checks for a single child.

"It could be the child's mother, or the grandmother or even an aunt, and on and on," she said.

Mrs. Griffiths said that of the two proposals, hers would provide the strongest curb on welfare abuse by requiring that an adult applicant for welfare aid to families present not only his own Social Security identification card but also the card issued the baby at birth.

This, she said, would prevent



Associated Press

Martha W. Griffiths

multiple welfare checks from being issued to a single adult applicant applying under different names, since each baby would have only one Social Security identification card.

Welfare Hearings Begin

Mrs. Griffiths sounded her call for assigning a Social Security number at birth as she opened hearings of a Joint Economic subcommittee into all phases of welfare aid.

The lead-off witness, Controller General Elmer B. Staats, readily agreed, under questioning, that he thought such a plan would simplify the administration of various Federal grant programs to individuals.

But Under Secretary John G. Veneman of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare appeared unconvinced. Asked by Mrs. Griffiths if he would join her in a drive for such a plan, Mr. Veneman grinned and said quickly: "I won't go with you that far."

Mrs. Griffiths' proposal is certain to be attacked even more strenuously than the Senate Finance Committee's by groups and individuals protesting what they see as growing Government invasions of privacy.

Just two weeks ago, Repre-

sentative Cornelius E. Gallagher, Democrat of New Jersey, sharply criticized the Senate committee's action and said:

"We may not be too far from the time when someone will seriously propose to have the Social Security account number branded on each baby at birth."

Mrs. Griffiths did not propose actual branding of numbers, just that babies be assigned Social Security numbers such as those now issued to job applicants and other adults.

The growing use of Social Security numbers as a universal means of identification has also been criticized by Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., chairman of A Senate subcommittee on constitutional rights.

Other Uses Cited

During hearings before his subcommittee last spring, Senator Ervin noted that the "Social Security card states on its face that it is not to be used for identification purposes, except for Social Security and income tax purposes."

Yet, he said, citizens are now being required to submit their Social Security numbers on voter registration affidavits, job applications, telephone records, credit applications, arrest rec-

ords, military records and driver's licenses.

Such widespread use of a single number of identification, Senator Ervin said, could lead to the Government's maintenance extensive computerized data banks of information on all citizens.

While conceding that use of Government data banks of information should be controlled, Elliot L. Richardson, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, told the Ervin subcommittee last year that it was not illegal for a non-Federal organization to use the Social Security number in its record-keeping system.

The hearings today by the Griffiths subcommittee were the opening round in a planned two-year study of how welfare programs are administered, whom they help, whom they neglect and how they work in combination with one another.

The study, Mr. Griffiths said, is designed to "determine how to best meet—effectively and economically—the actual needs of those less fortunate members of our society for whose benefit the programs are designed."

The subcommittee will hold hearings in New York on April 11-13; Detroit, May 3-5; and Atlanta, June 6-8.