

LOS ANGELES - Next week, the United States House of Representatives is scheduled to debate and vote on House Resolution 4090, the "Personal Responsibility, Work and Family Protection Act of 2002." H.R. 4090 would reauthorize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which is due to expire at the end of the year. TANF reauthorization has recently sparked heated debates not only on Capitol Hill, but across the entire country.

This morning, the Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness sponsored a TANF reauthorization press conference. Representative Xavier Becerra (CA - 30), the only congressional member from Southern California who is on the House Ways and Means Committee, submitted a statement to be read at the press conference.

Below is Rep. Becerra's entire statement:

"Next week, the United States House of Representatives will either take a smart step forward or a drastic and damaging step back. Next week, the House can tell America that it believes in and will adequately fund child care or it can tell America that it doesn't care enough about children. Come next week, the United States House of Representatives will debate and vote to reauthorize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant program.

"When TANF first passed in 1996, its stated goal was to end dependence on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage. The "work first" approach has led to an increase in job acquisition by welfare recipients. However, most of the women who are now working remain poor, rely on food stamps and Medicaid to supplement their wages, and struggle to find and pay for decent child care. In short, TANF has done little to reduce our nation's poverty among women and children.

"One in six children in this country still live in poverty. Most adults who have moved off the welfare rolls are working in low wage jobs that pay less than \$7 an hour with no health or pension benefits, and with little opportunity for advancement. Real welfare reform must include meaningful education and training opportunities for welfare recipients. Only when welfare recipients are properly trained will they be equipped to assume and hold real jobs with real advancement opportunities.

"Equipped or not, what mother is prepared to engage in full-time employment without a real sense of security and well being for her child during her absence? As any expert on welfare policy or the best expert of all, a working parent, will tell you, decent child care is indispensable. That is why Democrats are calling for TANF reauthorization to include a dramatic new investment in child care, ensuring that welfare leavers and the working poor have access to quality, affordable day care. The current Republican reauthorization bill that the House will debate next week glaringly fails to expand child care funding. In California alone, more than 280,000 children in working families qualify for child care assistance on the basis of income, but do not currently receive it.

"In 1996 I, along with many of my colleagues, raised concerns about the likely pitfalls of the original TANF legislation. As Congress continues the TANF reauthorization process, we must look beyond the numbers and focus on the faces - the women and children who are living in poverty and struggling to survive.

"What we as a government do not do up front to offer children proper day care and a sound education, we're going to have to pay for later. Our actions next week in the House of Representatives have a chance to dramatically curb welfare dependency and prepare the next generation for a life of productive work. We can do that or we can simply accept the status quo. Meaningful welfare reform stands in the balance.

"I want to thank you for allowing me to be a part of this important event this

morning. I especially want to thank Bob Erlenbusch and the rest of the folks at the Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness and the other sponsoring organizations for their tireless efforts to reduce poverty in our city."