

Speaker urges welfare reform

By Tom Shelton

Ronald Reagan's chief deputy director of social welfare when he was governor of California said Thursday night that the "stage is now set for an overhaul of the welfare system."

Charles D. Hobbs, who served for Reagan from 1970 through 1972, spoke about "The Decline and Fall of the Welfare Industry" before a crowd of 200 at the Sheldon Memorial Art Museum.

Hobbs said the welfare system, which began with the expressed purpose of helping people, has become a system more interested in helping itself.

He said the welfare industry is spending too much and that the escalation of welfare expenditures began with Lyndon Johnson's "war on poverty" during the 1960s.

Hobbs said the fact that one out of every four persons in the United States is on welfare demonstrates the system has become too generous in deciding which people are "the truly needy."

"The welfare industry has escalated the level of need to make more people eligible for benefits," Hobbs said. "The increase of the amount of need is the welfare industry's counterpart to demand."

Hobbs said the welfare industry intentionally makes its system as complex as it can so no one, not even Congress, knows exactly how to attack its growth.

Reform attempts

Hobbs said those who attempt to reform the welfare industry are repeatedly defeated by the system, which he said "altered reform attempts to continue its expansionary goals."

Hobbs criticized the number of welfare programs and said 47 was too many and only complicated things.

Hobbs said many families take advantage of being eligible for too many programs and that overlapping benefits "point out the absurd complexities of the system."

Hobbs praised Reagan's performance as governor of California. He said Reagan "stood up and told people the welfare system is not a good way to live."

Hobbs said Reagan reduced the number of welfare recipients in California while increasing the amount paid to the truly needy.

Hobbs said the time has come to reverse the growth of welfare expenditures and the number of dependents.

He said that by reducing duplicate programming, welfare costs could be cut 50 percent. In addition, Hobbs advocated the reduction of the number of workers in the welfare industry.

Decentralization

Hobbs said that the welfare system has to be decentralized to become more efficient. "This will be the most important and difficult problem," he said.

Hobbs stressed the need for state control of welfare and said control should eventually pass to the local level.

Hobbs said welfare reform will take time and that the welfare industry will fight back.

"Reform will contradict with the paternal philosophy of the welfare industry which says that welfare recipients can't take care of themselves."

Hobbs said welfare is an incentive to be non-productive and has made recipients outsiders to the capitalist system. "It seems to me that capitalism should apply to everyone," he said.

After his speech, Hobbs answered questions. Wallace C. Peterson, UNL professor of economics, responded to Hobbs' speech.

Calling several of Hobbs' figures "severe distortions," Peterson said Hobbs was looking for "a conspiracy and a

scapegoat" and said Hobbs had found one in the welfare industry.

Rare exceptions

Peterson said that very few welfare families eligible for more than one benefit take advantage of them. He said that welfare abuses like those reported by the media are rare exceptions.

Peterson said Hobbs supported his attack on the welfare industry with figures distorted because they were recorded during times of recession or war.

After Peterson's five-minute impromptu oration, Hobbs commented, "That's an awful lot of question to answer at one time."

"Those were comments," Peterson said. His statement drew laughter from the mostly reserved, formally attired crowd, which had politely listened to Hobbs' speech.


Hobbs repeated many of his previous statements and said his figures were accurate and often used by "men not generally thought of as conservatives."

After the Hobbs-Peterson exchange, several more questions were asked, but none had similar impact.


Hobbs' presentation was made possible by a grant from the Dr. Scholl Foundation Forum on the Future of Private Enterprise. It was organized chiefly through the efforts of Dolores T. Martin, UNL associate professor of economics. The next speech in the series will be Oct. 22.

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