NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Morna Murray: Truth Matters

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 5, 2012 Distinctly Catholic

Morna Murray, who has served previously in a variety of positions, including Special Counsel to Sen. Bob Casey of Pennsylvania and Executive Director of catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, has a post up at her Facebook page that explains why the Romney campaign ads on welfare are not complexly wrong, but simply wrong. With her permission, I publish her post in full here.

Truth Matters

It?s hard to turn on your TV or computer without seeing the Romney-Ryan campaign claiming that President Obama has eliminated the ?work? requirement from welfare reform. Possibly the most fascinating thing about this campaign controversy is the fact that there is no controversy. The accusation is false. This is about as non-issue as it gets. It?s neck and neck with the voter fraud non-issue. [Aside: Since 2000, there has been a .000001 incidence of voter fraud ? yes that?s 5 zeros, and the study is from the Carnegie and Knight Foundations].

To clarify, this commentary is not debating the value of welfare to work, welfare reform, or the federal program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which is what we now call the pre-1996 welfare program. The welfare reform law that President Clinton signed in 1996 added a work component, requiring recipients to find employment, and promised to ?end welfare as we know it.? And it did.

This simply addresses the claim that President Obama has eliminated the work requirement instituted by the 1996 welfare reform law, as charged, repeatedly, by Governor Romney and Mr. Ryan.

He has not.

The Health and Human Services (HHS) Agency also has not. HHS did issue a memorandum on July 12, 2012. It was the kind of memorandum that HHS routinely and frequently issues. States make requests of HHS all the time to change or propose alternatives to the ways they meet federal requirements under Medicaid and other federal laws. It is part of HHS? job to clarify and respond to such state requests.

This particular announcement allows states to propose alternative ways to increase the numbers of TANF recipients they are moving into the workforce under the TANF program, or otherwise more effectively meet TANF goals. States still must meet a minimum percentage of TANF recipients who are employed. The time limit for beneficiaries receiving TANF benefits remains the same. BUT, states can propose (not automatically implement, because the waiver has to be approved), alternative ways to increase their workforce goals under TANF.

This is giving states potential flexibility ? something governors, and many Republican governors, want. As only one example, a significant criticism of the current law is that it does not help some of the poorest recipients (75% of whom are single mothers) get out of poverty because the only jobs for which they are qualified pay $7 or $8 per hour. Imagine raising your kids, paying for housing, transportation, food, on minimum wage? These individuals get stuck in the lowest levels of poverty. So, some states would like to include job training or post-

secondary educational requirements within the ?work? requirement to allow people to lift themselves out of poverty. You could add, ?by their bootstraps? and it would be accurate. To gain skills or education so they can make $14 or $18 or $20 per hour. So they can STOP being dependent on welfare. That?s what the President?s waiver makes possible ? for states that can prove they have a plan that works.

Everyone should like that. This IS a solution to a real problem. And interestingly, in 2005, when Mitt Romney was governor of Massachusetts, he, along with 29 other Republican governors, sent a letter to then-Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, requesting that same flexibility in managing their TANF programs.

But this is not the way, 7 years later, Governor Romney and Mr. Ryan have described the current Administration?s option for waiver proposals.

A Romney campaign ad credits President Clinton with ?end[ing] welfare as we know it by requiring work for welfare.? ?But on July 12,? the ad continues, ?President Obama quietly announced a plan to gut welfare reform by dropping work requirements. Under Obama?s plan, you wouldn?t have to work and wouldn?t have to train for a job. They just send you your welfare check.?

Not true. Not true. Not true. You don?t see former President Clinton doing many campaign ads these days, but he did come out and denounce that claim, and quickly. It?s just such a blatant falsehood. Many commentators, on both sides of the political spectrum, have also alluded to the undertones of racism in this distortion.

Here?s a fact. The Obama administration created the waiver option in response to governors? contentions that they could produce better results if they were not bound by inflexible federal welfare rules.

A comment from Governor Romney on August 22, in Zanesville, OH, is particularly egregious, in light of the facts:

"How in the world could he [the President] not understand the power of work, the dignity of work? And taking work out of welfare is something I'll change. I'll tell you that ? day one." Wow. He?s actually accusing President Obama of not understanding the dignity of work, a fundamental American value? And Governor Romney makes this accusation based on a total distortion of facts? This is active and intentional misleading of the citizen electorate by a man seeking the office of President of the United States.

Here?s how Governor Gary Herbert (R) explained Utah?s request for the waiver: '?Utah's request for a waiver stems from a desire for increased customization of the program to maximize employment among Utah?s welfare recipients.?

I?ll end with a quote from one of the key Republican architects of the 1996 welfare reform law, Ron Haskins. Mr. Haskins was staff director of the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee subcommittee that drafted the welfare reform law, meaning he oversaw and edited and read and re-read every darn word. On August 8, 2012, in an interview with NPR, Mr. Haskins said: "There's no plausible scenario under which it [the waiver option] really constitutes a serious attack on welfare reform."

And that is today?s fact check. What do YOU think?

Source URL (retrieved on *07/11/2014 - 00:55*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/morna-murray-truth-matters