

Editorial

How Successful Has TANF Been? Taking Seriously a Thoughtful Analysis From the Right, With a Tip of the Hat to Peter the Citizen

Max J. Skidmore

Editor Max J. Skidmore discusses a welcome exchange with the co-author of a 1983 article on Social Security that he has severely criticized numerous times. Peter Germanis, now writing as "Peter the Citizen," reached out to indicate that he now directs his attention to TANF, and has not considered Social Security for many years. The resulting communication clearly demonstrates that thoughtful conservatives can set aside ideological considerations and collaborate with those of differing views without sacrificing their basic principles. Despite claims of success, TANF has failed to achieve its goals, and has had disastrous results. His analyses are insightful, and should serve as the basis for reform of "welfare reform." What should be rejected soundly is any use of TANF as a model for revision of policy.

KEY WORDS: TANF, Peter the Citizen, welfare reform, failed policy, spurious claims, public policy

For many years, I have been a harsh critic of a 1983 article on Social Security that emerged from the Cato Institute, and that provided a blueprint for many of the subsequent attacks on the program, continuing until the present. Most recently (January 7, 2016), I mentioned the article in a piece I did for the *Huffington Post*, "At Last it's Becoming Clear: The Need is to Expand, not Cut, Social Security," http://www.huffingtonpost.com/max-j-skidmore/at-last-its-becoming-clea_b_8924642.html?. The day after publication, I received a message from Peter Germanis, a co-author of the article that I had criticized, suggesting that I consider some of his current work on welfare reform. I did so, and with his permission, I reproduce here some of our correspondence, and some of his pieces on TANF. I consider them to be highly important.

He wrote to me:

I just saw your article in the *Huffington Post* about Social Security. I understand you were not too happy with the position Stuart Butler and

I took in the CATO paper. I'm not writing about that, but given your interest in poverty and welfare, I thought you might find something I wrote more recently of interest, particularly in view of Speaker Ryan's upcoming summit on poverty.

On the same day, I replied as follows:

Mr. Germanis,

I'm undisciplined. I couldn't resist putting everything aside (I'm very busy today) to read your most interesting piece.

Yes, as you can tell, I disagree with your Cato article because I have become skeptical of libertarian solutions. Nevertheless, I think it was highly effective, and as I indicated, it has influenced the public discourse ever since. Regardless of my criticism, I think that you and I share a belief that it is important to find effective solutions (public, private, a mixture, or whatever)—something that not all who call themselves conservatives would accept.

As you no doubt could not tell, I once was a staunch conservative, and in my early years, I would have agreed with you across the board. One is supposed to get more conservative with age, but I have gone in the opposite direction. Even though on Christmas Day I turned 82, I find myself more in agreement with Bernie Sanders than I would ever have thought possible.

Despite my shift in orientation, I have always recognized that there is nothing conservative or liberal about recognizing reality. Thus, I applaud your emphasis on looking at things as they manifestly are, and not as rose-tinted glasses would make them appear to be. I am no ideologue, and I now sense that you are not one either. I think we can agree to evaluate a program based on whether it works or not (i.e., whether it makes things better or worse), regardless of whether it is "conservative" or "liberal." I couldn't care less what label one wishes to use (or who gets the credit). I agree with you about the failure of TANF to do what it was supposed to do, and I certainly agree that following failed examples not only makes no sense, but is absolutely contrary to reason. When one wishes to get out of a hole, so the saying goes, one doesn't immediately grab a shovel.

We need reasonable conservatism in this country, and voices such as yours are being drowned out. Your letter to Speaker Ryan demonstrates that you are attempting to be heard. I hope they listen.

Thanks for your thoughtful piece. You were correct. I do indeed find it of interest, and I appreciate your perspective.

Best wishes,

Max

I must take care to mention that Mr. Germanis's current work consists of occasional pieces, written on his own time and not representing any opinion other than his own. He speaks for no organization, and writes as "Peter the Citizen." Michael Wiseman, Research Professor of Public Policy, Public Administration, and Economics at George Washington University, publishes papers by Peter the Citizen on his website, and describes him as "an ardent conservative deeply concerned about truth in policy making and policy assessment." Wiseman provides an extensive collection from Peter the Citizen at <http://mlwiseman.com/?portfolio=peter-the-citizen>.

It bears repeating that I was delighted with what I found. I consider "Peter the Citizen" to be doing some of the most important work on welfare, specifically because he not only presents thoughtful and well-reasoned analyses, but because he does so as a conservative who has been at the center of much of the reform efforts. He has the courage to view the results objectively, and speak "truth to power": the reforms have failed.

His work is beginning to be noticed. Eduardo Porter, an economics writer for the *New York Times*, for example, recognized "The Republican Party's Strategy to Ignore Poverty" (Porter, October 28, 2015 B1). He wrote about TANF that "for all the talk about creating opportunity for the poor ... it's hard to view these plans as anything but a bald effort to save money." Porter cited Germanis for support, and identified him as one of the advisers on welfare policy in the Reagan administration, and as having been affiliated with conservative advocacy and research organizations in Washington, such as the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute.

To do justice to "Peter the Citizen," I present his most recent work directly, in his own words, and unedited.

**TANF in Texas: The Need for "A Much Better Way":
A Cautionary Tale for Ways and Means Chairman Brady¹**

August 30, 2016

Many conservatives view the 1996 welfare reform law (particularly the creation of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or TANF block grant) an unprecedented success and a model for reforming other safety net programs. For example, on August 22, House Ways and Means Chairman Kevin Brady issued the following statement:

Twenty years ago, Republicans successfully concluded a multi-year, national effort to reform America's cash welfare program. The reform was based on one simple idea: the best way to change lives and help people out of poverty is a job.²

The suggestion that TANF is a successful reform and helps people out of poverty is, by any objective analysis, wrong. While the law sent a symbolic message about the importance of work requirements and time limits, in practice, neither of these elements have been implemented in the way Congress intended. In fact, TANF is not "welfare reform" at all, but a fixed and flexible funding stream that has failed to provide an adequate safety net or an effective welfare-to-work program. In many states, it has become a slush fund used to supplant state spending and fill budget holes. It is really welfare for states, not needy families.

TANF's Withering Cash Assistance Safety Net in Texas

Chairman Brady, in describing TANF's "success," said:

This approach has delivered lasting results for children and families, lowering poverty over the past 20 years by increasing work and earnings. From 1995 through 2007, 1.5 million single mothers went to work, and the share of children in poverty fell dramatically. And, despite the severity of the most recent recession, this success has endured. The number of families receiving cash assistance from the TANF program has fallen more than 60 percent since 1996 to roughly 3.8 million today—a decrease of more than 10 million people since 1994.³

The increase in the employment rate and drop in child poverty rates didn't "last"; the positive trends suddenly stopped in 2000 and have been going in the wrong direction since. Moreover, most of the positive results would have happened regardless of whether TANF was enacted or not, due to the strong economy, increased aid to the working poor, and welfare reform being conducted through waivers. To the extent TANF played a role, it was a strong work "message" (not work requirements) and the fact that in TANF's early years Congress gave states a massive windfall in federal funding because the block grant was based on welfare spending years earlier when caseloads were at historic highs.

TANF is best examined state-by-state. In Texas, between 1995 and 2014 the number of poor families with children rose from 552,200 to 707,100, as did the number in deep poverty, from 218,600 to 281,000. Meanwhile, the TANF caseload plummeted 87 percent, from 257,800 to 34,300. As a result, the TANF-to-poverty ratio in Texas fell from 47 to 5.⁴ In other words, in 2014, for every 100 poor families with children, only five received TANF cash assistance. These results are a dramatic indication of the collapse of the cash assistance safety net in Texas.

Chairman Brady, suggested that TANF's "success has endured" despite the severity of the recession. Between 2007 and 2014, the number of poor families with children rose from 638,600 to 707,100, even as the cash assistance caseload fell even further, from 62,500 to 34,300. How exactly is this "success" for a program that it supposed to be a safety net?

TANF as a Slush Fund in Texas

Chairman Brady asserted that flexibility and resources are a key part to TANF's success, "Importantly, TANF provided states with flexibility and resources to develop innovative local solutions that would best meet the needs of people in their communities."⁵ In fact, TANF gave states *excessive* flexibility, allowing them to use TANF as a slush fund and, in many cases, to circumvent federal requirements, most notably work requirements. TANF is a blank check with no accountability.

The Texas experience demonstrates that TANF is often little more than revenue sharing. Like many other states, Texas uses a considerable share of its TANF funds to simply supplant state expenditures, a trend that started with TANF's inception, as described in 2006 by the Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP):

Over the last decade Texas has spent an increasing share of the block grant on child protection and foster care—first to "supplant" (replace) the general revenue that used to fund these services and later to expand funding for these services. As a result, fewer TANF funds are spent on cash assistance and other work support programs designed to help parents make the transition from welfare to work. For example, spending on cash assistance accounted for 67% of the block grant in 1997; now it makes up only 22%. Further, funding for employment and training has not increased since 1999, and no federal TANF funds are used to fund child care for "working poor" families—families who make too much to qualify for TANF but too little to afford child care. Texas' use of the TANF block grant to supplant state spending on child protection also leaves funding for child protection vulnerable to potential changes at the federal level, both in the form of cuts to the TANF block grant or changes in how child protection is financed.⁶

Similarly, a report on the state's workforce investment policies reinforces the notion that TANF is not "welfare reform" but a flexible funding stream:

Texas currently invests little of its TANF block grant in providing education, training and work supports for working poor Texans. In fact, Texas has not taken an overall strategic approach to using its block grant to provide services to working poor families. In particular Texas

does not use direct or transferred TANF spending on child care for working poor families. Texas has come to view the TANF block grant as yet another fungible source of federal funds available to supplant state spending. As a result, the three funds now underwrite major portions of the child welfare budget and tangential services at numerous other state agencies. Of the annual allocation of over \$500 million, precious little TANF funding is targeted at the purported purposes of the program.⁷

In fiscal year (FY) 2014, Texas used just 20 percent of its TANF/MOE funds on core welfare reform activities—basic assistance, work activities, and child care.⁸ Shawn Fremstad of the Center for American Progress hit the nail on the head in his assessment of the Texas TANF program—and indeed TANF programs across the nation—when he said:

As the Texas TANF slush fund example shows, Temporary Assistance is failing. Instead of going to 50 state slush funds, the federal government should use the federal funds in the program to create a coherent, effective, and fair program of job search and unemployment assistance for low-income parents.⁹

In terms of “resources,” Chairman Brady suggested that TANF provides states with adequate funding to develop solutions. Each state’s allocation is based on historic funding levels in TANF’s predecessor programs (AFDC, Emergency Assistance, and JOBS). This locked in historical differences in federal funding across states. Gene Falk of the Congressional Research Service notes that the difference in federal grants per poor child per year in FY 1995 ranged from \$263 in Arkansas to \$2,530 in Connecticut (\$402 to \$3,871 in 2013 dollars, respectively).¹⁰ In 2013, the differences ranged from \$280 in Texas and to \$2,572 in Vermont. As a welfare program, the vast disparity in federal funding per poor child is troubling. But, TANF is really revenue sharing, so why federal taxpayers would fund a revenue sharing program today based on historic spending in TANF’s predecessor programs makes no sense at all.

Note to Chairman Brady: Your colleague, Rep. Tom Reed of New York, also believes TANF is a success. In 2013, New York received \$2,555 in federal block grant funding per poor child per year, more than nine times the \$280 in federal block grant funding per poor child per year in Texas. How is this disparity a good deal for Texas? Do you really believe Texas can provide an adequate safety net and meaningful welfare-to-work activities with federal TANF funding of \$280 per child per year?

TANF Work Requirements Are Irrelevant in Texas

With respect to TANF’s work requirements, Chairman Brady said: “In 1996, Congress eliminated this New Deal-era program and replaced it with Temporary

Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which established strong requirements for states to help welfare recipients prepare for and find work.”¹¹

When it comes to welfare reform, conservatives have been unable to translate their ideas into effective policies—this is no more evident than in the case of TANF’s work requirements. TANF’s work requirements have never worked. The block grant structure has created a situation in which many states don’t invest the resources to run meaningful welfare-to-work programs, as the amount is not adjusted for inflation or demographic changes. And, the excessive state flexibility means that states can game the requirements to meet the federal work rate targets and, then divert the funds to uses unrelated to core welfare reform activities. TANF’s work requirements are unreasonable, unrealistic, unhelpful, and are not about work. The most disappointing way some states have met work requirements is by slashing TANF caseloads even as the number of families in deep poverty has risen. This is exactly what has happened in Texas. TANF’s work requirements in Texas are largely irrelevant—virtually no one receives cash assistance!

Note to Chairman Brady: In most of my state profiles, at this point, I would describe the various loopholes a state takes advantage of to meet TANF’s work requirements—loopholes created by Congress itself. I won’t do that here, because, as noted above, TANF cash assistance is virtually dead in Texas and work requirements are irrelevant. However, as Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, you may find some of my more detailed papers describing TANF’s failed work requirements of interest, such as “The Failure of TANF Work Requirements: A *Much Needed* Tutorial for the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute” or “TANF Work Requirements: An Epic Fail,” in *TANF is Broken!*¹² You also might find the struggles faced by Wisconsin, a state where the safety net was somewhat responsive during the recession and that is not taking advantage of loopholes; see “The Failure of TANF Work Requirements in Wisconsin: A Note for Speaker Ryan.”¹³

Do House Republicans Have a Better Way?

Chairman Brady suggested that TANF’s lessons be extended to other safety net programs:

House Republicans have a vision for the next round of welfare reforms that will help more people find jobs, escape poverty, and move up the economic ladder. As laid out in our “Better Way to Fight Poverty,” we are committed to attacking poverty at its roots through personalized solutions that break down barriers to a better life.

As the 1996 welfare reform demonstrated, by expecting welfare recipients to work or prepare for work in exchange for receiving benefits, we can transform millions of lives and provide low-income

Americans with real paths out of poverty. We have a responsibility to apply these successful lessons to help all those who remain trapped in poverty today.¹⁴

The American Enterprise Institute recently held an event discussing the Republican Study Committee's "Empowerment Initiative" report on strengthening the safety net. Harry Holzer, a professor of economics at Georgetown University, was a panelist commenting on the report. In his opening remarks, he said:

I took a quick look at the report; I'm going to have to say a lot of critical things. . . .politeness is not always my strong suit. . . .To me, this is a very blunt report, and it merits a very blunt response. Anything less than that would be dishonest. I'm going to try to get the right balance of politeness and bluntness. If I fail to get that right balance, I apologize. My reaction to this report was really pretty negative. . . .I found the report to be extremely partisan, extremely ideological. It's nasty in tone. . . . It's polarizing, it's polemical. . . . There are many statements in the report that I believe are demonstrably false if you look carefully at the research evidence.¹⁵

Professor Holzer was right¹⁶ and the same can be said about the "Poverty, Opportunity, and Upward Mobility" report that was released as part of a series of reports under the rubric of *A Better Way*.¹⁷ The report is devoid of any meaningful substance and lacks policy details, as I describe in some detail in my paper, "Speaker Ryan's 'Poverty, Opportunity, and Upward Mobility Report': The Need for 'A Much Better Way'."¹⁸

I believe I am uniquely qualified to make this statement. I am a conservative, I appreciate conservative principles, and I have a long history in welfare policy. From 1986 to 1996, I was involved in the development and implementation of President Reagan's 1986 welfare reform proposal, described in *Up from Dependency: A New National Public Assistance Strategy*.¹⁹ Unlike the "A Better Way" report, a mere 35 pages with a host of colorful charts that provide little substantive value, President Reagan's *Up from Dependency* reports came to nearly 2,000 pages. They included an in-depth description of welfare programs and the welfare system, an examination of Census data on poverty to assess the effectiveness of the nation's anti-poverty programs, a catalog of self-help programs, and an overview of the academic research on welfare's effects on work, family formation and a range of other topics. These reports were not conservative talking points; they were a fair and balanced assessment of the welfare system and its effects. This should be the starting point for thinking about reform proposals.

Speaker Ryan was right when he said: "The House is broken. We are not solving problems. We are adding to them."²⁰ The Task Force's Report for reforming the safety net is a seriously flawed document—it would not solve

problems; it would add to them. It is time for conservatives to learn TANF's real lessons—one place to start is Texas.

As described above, TANF is not “welfare reform”; it is not a “success”; it is *Truly a National Failure (TANF)*. The fact that conservatives do not understand this suggests that they do not have “A Better Way”—they have “The Wrong Way.”

- 1 The views in this document reflect my own as a citizen and do not reflect the views of any organization I am now or have ever been affiliated with. By way of background, I consider myself a conservative and have worked on welfare issues for the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the White House under both President Reagan and President George H.W. Bush. This paper assumes the reader has a basic understanding of the TANF program, but for those readers who want more context and background, see Peter Germanis, *TANF is Broken! It's Time to Reform "Welfare Reform" (And Fix the Problems, Not Treat their Symptoms)*, July 25, 2015 draft, available at: <http://mlwiseman.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/TANF-is-Broken.072515.pdf>.
- 2 Rep. Kevin Brady, “Twenty years after welfare reform, the path ahead,” August 22, 2016, available at: <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/icymi-chairman-brady-op-ed-hill-20th-anniversary-welfare-reform/>.
- 3 Rep. Kevin Brady, “Twenty years after welfare reform, the path ahead,” August 22, 2016, available at: <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/icymi-chairman-brady-op-ed-hill-20th-anniversary-welfare-reform/>.
- 4 Ife Floyd, LaDonna Pavetti, and Liz Schott, “TANF Continues to Weaken as a Safety Net,” October 27, 2015, available at: <http://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/tanf-continues-to-weaken-as-a-safety-net>. The dates are really two-year average (for sample size reasons) and for simplicity, I used the second year. So, when I refer to 1995, it is actually a two-year average of 1994 and 1995.
- 5 Rep. Kevin Brady, “Twenty years after welfare reform, the path ahead,” August 22, 2016, available at: <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/icymi-chairman-brady-op-ed-hill-20th-anniversary-welfare-reform/>.
- 6 Center for Public Policy Priorities, “TANF at 10: Was Welfare Reform a Success in Texas,” August 21, 2006, available at: <http://library.cppp.org/files/3/tanf10.pdf>.
- 7 Jason Sabo, Carlos Romo, Patrick Bresette, and Chris Pieper, *Texas at Work: Today and Tomorrow – The Case for Sound Workforce Investment Policies*, Center for Public Policy Priorities, September 2003, available at: http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/small_states/assessment/texas.pdf.
- 8 Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, TANF Financial Data – FY 2014,” July 7, 2015 available at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource/tanf-financial-data-fy-2014>.
- 9 Shawn Fremstad, “Temporary Assistance for Families Should Empower Working-Class Parents Not Serve as a Slush Fund for States,” Center for

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 - 11 Rep. Kevin Brady, "Twenty years after welfare reform, the path ahead," August 22, 2016, available at: <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/icymi-chairman-brady-op-ed-hill-20th-anniversary-welfare-reform/>.
 - 12 Papers by Peter the Citizen are available at: <http://mlwiseman.com/?portfolio=peter-the-citizen>.
 - 13 Papers by Peter the Citizen are available at: <http://mlwiseman.com/?portfolio=peter-the-citizen>.
 - 14 Rep. Kevin Brady, "Twenty years after welfare reform, the path ahead," August 22, 2016, available at: <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/icymi-chairman-brady-op-ed-hill-20th-anniversary-welfare-reform/>.
 - 15 See the video of Holzer's remarks at American Enterprise Institute, "Empowering Americans in poverty: A proposal for reforming the safety net," July 11, 2016, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXvXI1fr7c0&feature=youtu.be&t=3121>.
 - 16 Peter Germanis, "Republican Study Committee Blueprint on the Safety Net: It's Time to Go Back to the Drawing Board," May 14, 2016, available at: <http://mlwiseman.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/RSC.052216.pdf>.
 - 17 "Poverty, Opportunity, and Upward Mobility," in *A Better Way: Our Vision for a Confident America*, June 7, 2016, available at: http://abetterway.speaker.gov/_assets/pdf/ABetterWay-Poverty-PolicyPaper.pdf.
 - 18 Papers by Peter the Citizen are available at: <http://mlwiseman.com/?portfolio=peter-the-citizen>.
 - 19 Executive Office of the President, *Up from Dependency: A New National Public Assistance Strategy. Report to the President*, December 1986, available at: https://archive.org/details/ERIC_ED316587.
 - 20 Speaker Paul Ryan, "Speaker Ryan's Remarks to the House of Representatives," Speaker Ryan's Press Office, October 29, 2015, available at: <http://www.speaker.gov/press-release/speaker-ryans-remarks-house-representatives>.

Welfare Reform: A Failure of Conservative Policymaking

A Response to Ramesh Ponnuru¹

Peter Germanis

August 27, 2016

Arthur Brooks, president of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), once said, "What is most important on the right is not to shut down the competition of ideas."² I welcome that spirit, and that is why I offer an alternative conservative

perspective to the conventional wisdom that the 1996 welfare reform law, and the creation of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, was an “unprecedented success.” In fact, I argue that TANF is a policy failure and should not be held out as an example of “conservatism.” I offer an alternative conservative perspective, based on a model developed in the Reagan Administration, which provided states flexibility, but unlike TANF had strong accountability provisions—most notably cost neutrality and rigorous evaluation—to ensure that states actually helped needy families. This approach was continued by President George H.W. Bush and President Clinton. TANF replaced this evidence-based approach with a blank check and no meaningful accountability. For the past year, I have been writing critiques of TANF and “responses” to those who suggest TANF has been a “success.”

Ramesh Ponnuru, a senior editor for *National Review* and a Visiting Fellow at AEI, recently claimed, “Welfare reform may be the last great bipartisan success story.”³ It is true that former President Bill Clinton signed the 1996 welfare reform law, but the details of the law were worked out by conservatives. Writing about the politics of the 1996 legislation, Robert Rector of The Heritage Foundation stated: “It isn’t enough to get the technical details of a policy right. Words and symbols matter, too.”⁴ Unfortunately, when it comes to the TANF legislation, conservatives got virtually every technical detail wrong. “Welfare reform” is not a “bipartisan success story”; it is a failure of conservative policymaking. This note is not intended to be a full response to Ponnuru’s claim that “welfare reform” is a success, but rather a summary of some of the problems associated with the conventional conservative wisdom on this topic. Selected statements by Ponnuru are followed by a “PC Response” (where PC refers to my pseudonym—“Peter the Citizen”).

Ramesh Ponnuru: “Scott Winship, a careful researcher at the conservative Manhattan Institute, has a new report arguing that welfare reform deserves to be remembered fondly.”

PC Response: In “Poverty After Welfare Reform,” Scott Winship of the Manhattan Institute describes the main weaknesses of the “official” poverty measure, most notably its failure to count as income non-cash benefits and refundable tax credits. He shows that counting such benefits has a significant effect in reducing poverty, thus dispelling Speaker Ryan’s recent claim, “For years—decades now—Washington has spent trillions of dollars on dozens of programs to fight poverty. But we have barely moved the needle. The war on poverty is a stalemate at best.”⁵

Winship also addresses other issues in poverty measurement, most notably the effect of cohabitation, the price index used to adjust poverty thresholds, and underreporting of income on household surveys. His analysis of poverty rates and trends over time is “careful,” but other “careful” researchers have reached different conclusions based on differences in data and/or methodological approach. This response does not address these technical issues.

The problem arises when Winship asserts that “welfare reform” *caused* poverty rates to fall. This is most clearly reflected in the titles of some of his articles: “Welfare Reform Reduced Poverty and Nobody Can Contest It”⁶ and

“Happy birthday, welfare reform: The law signed by Bill Clinton in 1996 helped millions of American families rise out of poverty.”⁷ In “Poverty After Welfare Reform,” he suggests that TANF’s “lessons” should be extended to other safety net programs:

The idea that rolling back welfare reform would help the poor is wholly unjustified by the evidence. Obviously, much depends on the details of future proposals, but the facts do not even imply that extending the lessons of welfare reform to other safety-net programs would be harmful to the very poor.⁸

Winship presents absolutely no “facts” about TANF or any credible “evidence” of its impacts beyond merely asserting that it increased employment and reduced poverty. He compares poverty rates before and after the 1996 law passed and based on that comparison declares success. There are many factors that affect poverty beyond “welfare reform”—the economy; the expansion in health spending and aid to the working poor; and changes in drug use, crime, teen pregnancy, and other social behaviors. Winship’s analysis of poverty rates, while impressive, is not a basis for making causal inferences about the effects of “welfare reform.” By this same line of reasoning, conservatives should embrace “Obamacare,” as the percentage of people without health insurance for the entire year fell from 15.5 percent in 2010 to 10.4 percent in 2014.⁹

A “careful researcher” would be more cautious about making unsupported claims.

Ramesh Ponnuru: “Liberals have also grown more and more convinced over time that welfare reform was a material disaster for the poorest among us and therefore a moral disaster for the nation as a whole. For their side, many conservatives have pronounced the system a failure as well, claiming that its safety-net features have done little to affect poverty rates. The good news is that claims on both sides are almost certainly wrong.”

PC Response: This argument confuses “welfare reform” with the “safety net.” The creation of TANF (“welfare reform”) shredded the cash assistance safety net for some of the nation’s neediest families. Winship could easily have shown TANF’s direct effects on poverty by adding a poverty line above his “cash income” line—one that is “cash income less TANF cash assistance.” Since TANF spending on cash assistance has fallen by over \$20 billion in real terms since 1996, from over \$30 billion to less than \$10 billion, it should come as no surprise that TANF is less effective in reducing poverty today than in 1996.

Federal spending on the nation’s major means-tested welfare programs, however, has more than doubled since 1996 (in constant dollars), from about \$300 billion in 1996 to about \$650 billion in 2014.¹⁰ As I indicated in the title of my response to his paper, “TANF is a Massive *Policy Failure*, But Other ‘Liberal’ Welfare Policies Reduced Poverty: A Response to Scott Winship,” if his analysis shows anything, it is that spending more money on anti-poverty programs

reduces poverty. (See also, Jordan Weissmann's "The Odd Conservative Argument That Food Stamps and Medicaid Saved the Poor From Welfare Reform."¹¹)

The fact that non-TANF spending on means-tested programs grew and offset the failure of TANF as a safety net program is not really a defense of TANF, although Winship does use this argument:

The question is what would have happened in the absence of the welfare reform we actually implemented. This is a very difficult question to answer. If the AFDC program circa 1991 remained with us today, would policymakers have expanded SNAP, Medicaid, and the EITC as much as they actually did? Would they have created the Children's Health Insurance Program, made the Child Tax Credit refundable, or passed Obamacare? Would the antipoverty policy response during the Great Recession have been as strong?¹²

This is an unusual argument. Winship is suggesting that shredding the cash assistance safety net led to an expansion in other parts of the safety net. So, if we extend the TANF model to SNAP, can we expect to see child allowances, an increase in the minimum wage, and universal health care?

In terms of poverty, most of the expansion in spending, however, went to programs serving the working poor—not the families most affected by the demise of the cash assistance safety net. Examining changes in poverty *rates* does not capture the impact of changes in the depth of poverty. (For a more detailed discussion, see my paper, "'Welfare Reform' Increased Poverty and No One Can Contest It: A Note to Conservatives" and for the importance of a *cash* assistance safety net, "Understanding '\$2 a Day' Poverty: An Explanation for Robert Doar.")

Ramesh Ponnuru: "It imposed work requirements on many welfare recipients and gave states more flexibility in how they spent welfare funds."

PC Response: When it comes to welfare reform, conservatives have been unable to translate their ideas into effective policies—this is no more evident than in the case of TANF's work requirements. TANF's work requirements have never worked. The block grant structure has created a situation in which many states don't invest the resources to run meaningful welfare-to-work programs, as the amount is not adjusted for inflation or demographic changes. And, the excessive state flexibility means that states can game the requirements to meet the federal work rate targets and, then divert the funds to uses unrelated to core welfare reform activities. TANF's work requirements are unreasonable, unrealistic, unhelpful, and are not about work. (I have documented the problems in many papers, most recently in "The Failure of TANF Work Requirements: A *Much Needed* Tutorial for the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute" and "The Failure of TANF Work Requirements in Wisconsin: A Note for Speaker Ryan.")

TANF certainly did give states "more flexibility in how they spent welfare funds," but this was not a good thing, unless conservatives now believe that "revenue sharing" is the way to reduce poverty. More specifically, the creation of

the TANF block grant with *excessive* state flexibility set in motion changes that would: (i) initially provide large windfalls of federal funds for states, but also put in place a funding structure that in the longer-term would provide insufficient resources due to inflation and demographic changes; (ii) allow states to use federal funds to supplant their own spending (by tens of billions of dollars since TANF was created); (iii) permit states to convert TANF (over time) to a giant slush fund with minimal reporting and accountability provisions; (iv) impose a Rube Goldberg-like set of bureaucratic and ineffective funding formulas and requirements; and (v) give states excessive flexibility to avoid or evade virtually all of the federal requirements in the law, most notably work requirements and time limits. (For more detail, see: *TANF is Broken!*¹³)

Ramesh Ponnuru: “There is certainly room to argue that we should be doing more to fight poverty in America and doing a better job of allocating public resources. But Winship’s paper makes a powerful argument that to do so, we should build on the success of welfare reform rather than try to reverse it.”

PC Response: What are the “lessons” we should build on? Winship doesn’t really say. He talks about making welfare “less appealing”; the lesson from TANF then is that if you slash one program, others will expand ten-fold to reduce poverty. This is a bizarre argument and hardly a surefire way to reduce poverty.

Some conservatives believe TANF’s “work requirements” were the key to “welfare reform.” I am the only conservative who has written in any detail about these work requirements—they don’t provide a hand-up to needy families and states meet what are unrealistic requirements by gaming them. TANF set the conservative case for work requirements back by two decades and destroyed any credibility that conservatives might otherwise have had about extending work requirements to other safety net programs. Again, see: “The Failure of TANF Work Requirements: A *Much Needed* Tutorial for the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute” and “The Failure of TANF Work Requirements in Wisconsin: A Note for Speaker Ryan.”

In a recent tweet, Winship states: “EITC expansion MUCH preferable to min wage increases, unconditional guaranteed income. Ought to be focus of conservative antipoverty policy.” This comes just days after saying, “Welfare reform was the most successful anti-poverty legislation since the national expansion of food stamps in 1974. History will regard it as a model, not a mistake.” If “welfare reform” is the most successful “anti-poverty legislation” and a “model,” why should the EITC now be the focus on anti-poverty policy? Notably, the EITC is a federal entitlement—the direct opposite of TANF.

The main problem with conservative anti-poverty proposals is the absence of policy details. Winship provides no policy details, but he is not alone. Speaker Ryan’s “Poverty, Opportunity, and Upward Mobility” report that was released as part of a series of reports under the rubric of *A Better Way* is devoid of substance and policy details.¹⁴ In fact, aside from the papers I have written, no conservative has written a comprehensive assessment of how welfare reform has been implemented or provided recommendations with policy details to address its glaring deficiencies.

Conclusion

TANF is not a “bipartisan success.” This response just touches on some of its many problems (see *TANF is Broken!* for a detailed discussion of TANF’s dysfunctional provisions). If conservatives want to be seen as having serious ideas for tackling poverty, it is time to acknowledge that TANF, and indeed block grants of any kind, are bad public policy. We cannot give states a blank check and hope for the best. Certainly, it would be a massive mistake to replicate this model in other programs.

NOTE TO READER—an alternative approach: TANF replaced an evidence-based welfare reform model, which had strict accountability measures, with a blank check with virtually no meaningful accountability. In 1987, President Reagan started encouraging states to use existing authority to conduct welfare reform experiments—through waivers of AFDC’s rigid rules (and, to a lesser extent, food stamp and Medicaid rules due to more limited waiver authorities for those programs). This approach was continued by President Bush and President Clinton. When the 1996 law passed, many states simply continued these policies—they didn’t need TANF to enact “welfare reform.” This process did not provide a fixed level of funding, like block grants. Instead, it relied on an approach that would provide a real counterfactual using the “gold standard” of evaluation—random assignment. The findings from random assignment experiments are considered the most credible, because the experimental and control groups are alike and subject to the same external conditions, with the only difference being the intervention itself. Thus, any difference in outcomes between the groups can be attributed to the intervention—welfare reform—itsself. As a result, it would be possible to know whether state reforms actually reduced welfare dependency by increasing self-sufficiency. And, the experience of the control group could be used to ensure cost-neutrality, as the budgetary effects of any programmatic changes would be measured by examining the experimental-control group differences in costs. TANF replaced this approach with one that essentially provides states a blank check with no accountability.

Instead of TANF, the waiver process could have been improved and extended to other programs. As we built evidence of what works and what doesn’t, we would have had the basis for making national reforms. Now we have to start over. In reforming any safety net program, conservatives should look to the “Reagan model”—build in accountability and evaluation to ensure that the reform actually succeeds in reducing dependency and poverty. Do not replicate the “TANF model.”

- 1 The views in this document reflect my own as a citizen and do not reflect the views of any organization I am now or have ever been affiliated with. By way of background, I consider myself a conservative and have worked on welfare issues for the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the White House under both President Reagan and President George H.W. Bush. This paper assumes the reader has a basic understanding of the TANF

- program, but for those readers who want more context and background, see Peter Germanis, *TANF is Broken! It's Time to Reform "Welfare Reform" (And Fix the Problems, Not Treat their Symptoms)*, July 25, 2015 draft, available at: <http://mlwiseman.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/TANF-is-Broken.072515.pdf>; for all my papers, see: <http://mlwiseman.com/?portfolio=peter-the-citizen>.
- 2 See Jennifer Rubin, "Arthur Brooks: The battle of ideas," *The Washington Post*, December 9, 2012, available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/wp/2012/12/09/arthur-brooks-the-battle-of-ideas/>.
 - 3 Ramesh Ponnuru, "Welfare reform, the bipartisan success story," August 23, 2016, available at: <http://www.aei.org/publication/welfare-reform-the-bipartisan-success-story/>.
 - 4 Robert Rector, "Bill Clinton was Right," *The Washington Post*, August 23, 2006.
 - 5 Speaker Paul Ryan, "Weekly Republican Address: This is a Better Way," June 3, 2016, available at: <http://www.speaker.gov/press-release/a-better-way>.
 - 6 Scott Winship, "Welfare Reform Reduced Poverty and No One Can Contest It," *Forbes*, January 11, 2016, available at: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/scottwinship/2016/01/11/welfare-reform-reduced-poverty-and-no-one-can-contest-it/>.
 - 7 Scott Winship, "Happy birthday, welfare reform: The law signed by Bill Clinton in 1996 helped millions of American families rise out of poverty," August 25, 2016, available at: <http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/scottwinship-happy-birthday-welfare-reform-article-1.2764481>.
 - 8 Scott Winship, *Poverty After Welfare Reform* (Manhattan Institute, August 2016), p. 8, available at: <http://www.manhattan-institute.org/sites/default/files/R-SW-0816.pdf>.
 - 9 Jessica C. Smith and Carla Medalia, *Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2014* (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, September 2015), available at: <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p60-253.pdf>.
 - 10 Gene Falk, *Low-Income Assistance Programs: Trends in Federal Spending* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, May 7, 2014), available at: <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R41823.pdf>.
 - 11 Jordan Weissmann, "The Odd Conservative Argument That Food Stamps and Medicaid Saved the Poor From Welfare Reform," *Slate*, August 26, 2016, available at: http://www.slate.com/blogs/moneybox/2016/08/26/the_odd_conservative_case_that_welfare_didn_t_hurt_the_poor.html.
 - 12 Scott Winship, *Poverty After Welfare Reform* (Manhattan Institute, August 2016), p. 38, available at: <http://www.manhattan-institute.org/sites/default/files/R-SW-0816.pdf>.
 - 13 Peter Germanis, *TANF is Broken! It's Time to Reform "Welfare Reform" (And Fix the Problems, Not Treat their Symptoms)*, July 25, 2015 draft, available at: <http://mlwiseman.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/TANF-is-Broken.072515.pdf>.
 - 14 "Poverty, Opportunity, and Upward Mobility," in *A Better Way: Our Vision for a Confident America*, June 7, 2016, available at: http://abetterway.speaker.gov/_assets/pdf/ABetterWay-Poverty-PolicyPaper.pdf.

Making Progress on TANF

A Response to Scott Winship¹

Discussion Draft

Peter Germanis

August 25, 2016

I've had a Twitter account for four weeks. On August 22, Scott Winship replied to someone else's tweet about me saying, "True—I do find engaging him unproductive!" Fortunately, he seems to have had a change of heart and suggested that we might "make progress" if I could answer a number of questions. While I think I have answered the questions he raised in previous papers, I am happy to do so again. I will also respond to some of his other tweets and recent statements about "welfare reform" in the hopes that we can have a more productive debate.

In his tweets, Scott occasionally groups me with liberals or the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP). I respect the work of CBPP, but I am a conservative and offer an alternative conservative perspective to the conventional wisdom that the 1996 welfare reform law, and the creation of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, was an "unprecedented success." In fact, I argue that TANF is a massive policy failure and should not be held out as an example of "conservatism." I favor an alternative conservative approach based on a model developed in the Reagan Administration, which provided states flexibility, but had strong accountability provisions—most notably cost neutrality and rigorous evaluation—to ensure that states actually help needy families.

In my August 22, 2016, response to Scott's paper, "TANF is a Massive Policy Failure, But Other 'Liberal' Welfare Policies Reduced Poverty: A Response to Scott Winship," I did not take issue with his approach to poverty measurement, as that is not my area of expertise. However, like many conservatives, he makes claims about welfare reform's causal effects based on simple pre-post comparisons, without adequate recognition of other causal factors and without looking in the "black box." And, like many conservatives, he fails to acknowledge the magnitude of TANF's dysfunctionality. Conservatives have yet to write anything that even remotely reflects an understanding of what TANF looks like and how it has been implemented, much less its lessons for other safety net programs. (See, for example, my August 22, 2016, paper, "The Failure of TANF Work Requirements: A *Much Needed* Tutorial for the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute.") Writing in the *Daily News* about reforms to other safety net programs, Scott says:

Far from rolling back reforms, other lessons of the welfare overhaul should be extended to parts of the safety net that continue to embody perverse incentives, discouraging work and independence. . . . We ought to build into these programs provisions to discourage long-term dependence, generous exemptions from work requirements and time limits to

protect families with the greatest challenges—and financial support for the working poor to ensure that work leaves people better off.²

This sounds great, but as with virtually all conservative statements these days (including Speaker Ryan's *A Better Way*), there is no attention to detail.

By any objective analysis, TANF's work requirements are an abject failure, so how would work requirements for other programs be designed to prevent the gaming and bureaucratic disenfranchisement associated with TANF's requirements? What would be the required participation rate, who would be required to participate, how many hours would individuals be required to participate, what activities would be allowed, would there be restrictions on counting certain activities as under TANF, how would these requirements be funded, how would the effects be evaluated, what penalties would states face if they failed to meet work requirements, would there be reasonable cause provisions, could states that fail enter into corrective compliance, how would requirements across programs be coordinated, etc.? If conservatives want to be seen as serious thinkers about welfare reform, they need to master the policy details—that has been their biggest failure.

What follows is a series of tweets from Scott either raising questions directly to me or making statements about TANF as "welfare reform." In places, I have modified the wording from a particular tweet to make it easier for the reader, but these are not substantive changes. I also add a few statements from some of Scott's recent press articles. This note is not intended to be a full response to Scott's tweets or articles, but rather to highlight differences and possibly areas of agreement. Scott's statement is followed by a "PC Response" (where PC refers to my pseudonym—"Peter the Citizen").

TANF's Theoretical Effects

Scott Winship: "Here's how you & I could make some progress, Peter. I have acknowledged many times that states aren't doing much in way of training, job readiness, placement, etc., will you acknowledge even so, by making welfare less appealing vs work, reform could still have increased employment and thereby reduced poverty because that's the possibility you always ignore in your writing."

PC Response: In terms of employment, I agree and have addressed this in my papers, but only to a limited extent, because despite the theoretical possibility of an employment impact, I think the actual impact was small (as I explain below).

I acknowledged *your* recognition that states are doing little in the way of providing work-related activities and I appreciate that observation, as most conservatives believe TANF's work requirements are behind its putative success. In my June 13, 2016, paper, "The American Enterprise Institute's Proposals to 'Improve' TANF: A Cruel Hoax on the Poor," I quoted you in the midst of a response to something AEI had written about work requirements:

From TANF's inception, caseloads fell much faster than the number of poor families (or families eligible for cash assistance). So, while there may have been some "help," much of the decline seems to have come from efforts to "cajole,

lure, or force" families off welfare (or keep them from coming on it), whether they have jobs or not.

Scott Winship of the Manhattan Institute notes the "under-performance" of states in this regard:³

One place where welfare reform has under-performed is in the small number of welfare recipients states have engaged in work-related activities. Most of the success of welfare reform in encouraging work can be attributed to the ways that it has made receipt of benefits less attractive relative to work. People largely left welfare or chose not to enroll independently of state work promotion efforts. Because states can count declines in welfare rolls as increases in work, and because they can game the federal work requirements via various strategies, few of them have devoted much effort toward helping recipients become employed or more employable.

Despite acknowledging the failure of states to engage a large number of recipients, Winship nevertheless believes TANF is a "success"—because it "made receipt of benefits less attractive relative to work." As such, TANF's main function has been to impose barriers and cut caseloads through a process known as "bureaucratic disentanglement." If this is the standard by which some conservatives define "success" TANF certainly has been very successful. A better measure would be to go by Speaker Ryan's words, who described success in terms of "how many people we help," further cautioning, "Those who protect the status quo must answer to the 46 million Americans living in poverty."

I did not emphasize the possibility that making welfare "less appealing" would increase employment in the response to AEI, but I did discuss that in my August 17, 2016, paper, "Speaker Ryan's 'Poverty, Opportunity, and Upward Mobility Report': The Need for 'A *Much* Better Way'." That Congressional report is devoid of any substance, whether it comes to describing a particular problem or in its policy solutions. I tried to explain to the authors how they should think about work incentive effects (in oversimplified terms) and the importance of understanding how "income" and "substitution" effects can influence work behavior. In that discussion, I described in no uncertain terms that making welfare less generous (if that's what you mean by "less appealing"), the incentive to work would increase. But, I also noted that there are other trade-offs.

With respect to poverty, the answer is more complicated. If caseloads decline because TANF increased employment, it might reduce poverty for those who get jobs, but it might exacerbate poverty for those who lose welfare without jobs. Even if the child poverty rate is down overall, as you assert (and I don't dispute), I do not believe it was due to TANF (as I explain below) and any effect would be small, particularly in comparison to its effects on increasing the depth of poverty for a far larger number of families (which isn't captured well by looking at rates).

Scott Winship: "If you agree then we can argue about whether it *did* do that, about whether other reforms would've been better, and about whether no reform would've been better."

PC Response: I AGREE that what you describe is *theoretically possible*. Making welfare less appealing should induce more work according to economic theory;

the answer with respect to poverty is much more difficult, because even if work goes up, if caseloads go down much faster there would be winners and losers to balance out (ignoring other behavioral responses, e.g., cohabitation).

Did TANF increase the employment rate of single mothers and reduce the poverty rate of single-mother families? I don't believe TANF had much impact (but not "no impact") on employment rates and that's why I don't mention it often. And, I believe it increased the depth of poverty for far more families than it "helped" through more employment.

As I explain this in many of my papers, I believe the employment and poverty rate trends would have continued in TANF's early years whether TANF was enacted or not. First, employment rates were rising sharply before TANF was implemented by states in 1997 (see table below); it is unreasonable to think this would have stopped had TANF not been enacted. Second, TANF added little to the flexibility states had with respect to cash assistance and conservatives themselves gutted the work requirements (and the requirement for an evaluation so we would really know the impact of public policies). So, from 1996 to 2000, when the employment rate grew fastest, from 63.5 percent to 72.8 percent, the main causal factors were the strong work message and a huge federal windfall in funding, some of which did go to child care and work supports. Over time, the work message weakened and the windfall disappeared. Third, employment and poverty impacts from random assignments experiments of "welfare reform" and "welfare-to-work programs" conducted during the period of the most rapid national decline showed much more modest effects than indicated by the pre-post changes.

I don't consider a simple pre-post comparison to be a valid way of measuring causal effects, but for the sake of argument, if one looks at changes in employment rates of single mothers between 1996 and 2013, they are relatively small compared to the drop in the TANF reciprocity rate of single mothers. The table below shows that the employment rate of single mothers is barely higher in 2013 than when TANF was implemented (65.3 percent vs. 63.5 percent). However, the AFDC/TANF reciprocity rate of single mothers is much lower—it declined from about 33 percent of single mother families to about 12 percent of single mother families. (The number of single-mother families receiving TANF is not a readily available statistic, but about 25 percent of the caseload consists of either two-parent families or are headed by non-parental caretaker relatives.) The "impact" is converted to the number of single mothers/single mother families by simply taking the rate in a particular year, subtracting the 1996 rate, and then multiplying the pre-post "impact" by the current year number of single mothers. Then we can see that the number gaining employment is small relative to the number losing TANF. The caseload decline is more than 11 times as great as the employment impact. The same approach could be undertaken with poverty rates. This is a simplistic approach, but if conservatives use a pre-post approach, they can note the employment gains, but they should not ignore the much, much larger number losing TANF.⁵

Single Mothers: Employment and Caseloads (draft)

| Year | # Single Mothers (000s) | Employment Rate | # Employed Single (000s) | Single Mom TANF (000s) | Single Mother TANF Receipt Rate | Gaining Employment (000s) | Losing TANF (000s) |
|------|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| 1988 | 8,321 | 57.4% | 4,776 | 2,812 | 34% | | |
| 1989 | 8,400 | 58.2% | 4,889 | 2,849 | 34% | | |
| 1990 | 8,745 | 60.3% | 5,273 | 3,043 | 35% | | |
| 1991 | 9,031 | 58.1% | 5,247 | 3,373 | 37% | | |
| 1992 | 9,567 | 57.3% | 5,482 | 3,622 | 38% | | |
| 1993 | 9,860 | 57.3% | 5,650 | 3,759 | 38% | | |
| 1994 | 9,837 | 58.0% | 5,705 | 3,775 | 38% | | |
| 1995 | 9,887 | 61.1% | 6,041 | 3,593 | 36% | | |
| 1996 | 10,052 | 63.5% | 6,383 | 3,326 | 33% | | |
| 1997 | 9,874 | 65.6% | 6,477 | 2,805 | 28% | 207 | -453 |
| 1998 | 9,881 | 68.8% | 6,798 | 2,288 | 23% | 524 | -973 |
| 1999 | 9,741 | 70.7% | 6,887 | 1,934 | 20% | 701 | -1,281 |
| 2000 | 9,712 | 72.8% | 7,070 | 1,727 | 18% | 903 | -1,478 |
| 2001 | 10,044 | 72.5% | 7,282 | 1,644 | 16% | 904 | -1,671 |
| 2002 | 10,206 | 71.2% | 7,267 | 1,640 | 16% | 786 | -1,728 |
| 2003 | 10,411 | 69.6% | 7,246 | 1,635 | 16% | 635 | -1,801 |
| 2004 | 10,489 | 69.7% | 7,311 | 1,615 | 15% | 650 | -1,847 |
| 2005 | 10,476 | 68.9% | 7,218 | 1,546 | 15% | 566 | -1,911 |
| 2006 | 10,938 | 69.6% | 7,613 | 1,430 | 13% | 667 | -2,180 |
| 2007 | 10,748 | 70.0% | 7,524 | 1,298 | 12% | 699 | -2,249 |
| 2008 | 10,797 | 69.1% | 7,461 | 1,276 | 12% | 605 | -2,287 |
| 2009 | 10,990 | 65.8% | 7,231 | 1,379 | 13% | 253 | -2,248 |
| 2010 | 11,185 | 64.1% | 7,170 | 1,439 | 13% | 67 | -2,252 |
| 2011 | 11,467 | 63.6% | 7,293 | 1,430 | 12% | 11 | -2,354 |
| 2012 | 11,125 | 65.7% | 7,309 | 1,389 | 12% | 245 | -2,282 |
| 2013 | 10,970 | 65.3% | 7,163 | 1,295 | 12% | 197 | -2,326 |

Those who consider the issues of welfare and of poverty in general under the rubric of “left,” or “right”—and that category includes most analyses—should take the writings of Peter the Citizen seriously. Although continuing to offer “conservative” solutions, Peter’s recent work flies in the face of ideologues by giving priority to the pragmatic. Results are what count.

I offer these essays from Peter the Citizen with the hope that his pragmatic approach, coming as it does from deep within the conservative culture that at times has been almost militantly ideological, will suggest new ways to deal with the persistent troubles caused by poverty. I thank him for his willingness to seek true solutions, rather than to impose an ideological framework.