



# Executive Alert



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ALL THAT'S NEW IN THE WORLD OF IDEAS

MAY/JUNE 2002

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Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao addresses the NCPA's "Women in the Economy" Conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. See page E-1.

## Privatizing Defense

The British spend less on defense every year than France and about the same amount as Germany. Yet of all the countries in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), only the United Kingdom has the ability to deploy advanced military assets to far-flung theaters of operation.

There are a number of factors explaining why, including the British military's superior training and traditionally strong leadership. But in recent years, the most decisive factor has been its willingness to do what no other European country will consider: privatize the military.

Like all western armed services, the British military has undergone significant budget reductions since the end of the Cold War.

■ From its peak in the mid-1980s, British defense spending has declined more than

30 percent to a current level of 2.7 percent of Gross Domestic Product.

■ The British Army's manpower was reduced by a third, and Britain faced the difficult choice of either continuing to reduce its forces or further slow the pace of modernization.

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***Of all the NATO countries, only Britain has the capability to deploy advanced military assets to far-flung theaters of operation.***

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■ In response, both Conservative and Labor governments engaged in a series of defense privatization contracts totaling \$4.6 billion.

■ As a result, by 1998 nearly 200 non-combat defense activities had been priva-

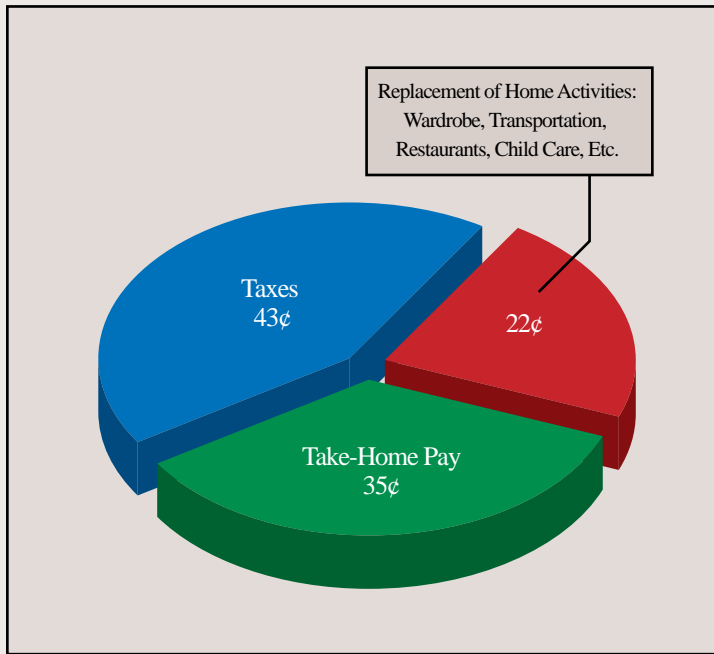
tized for an estimated savings of \$685 million (33 percent).

Privatization reached virtually every sector of Britain's defense establishment, including: airfields, dockyards and army bases; personnel recruitment and training; equipment supply and maintenance; military satellites; Internet services; payroll; research facilities; and logistical support and transport.

Funds that are saved from noncombatant military spending allow the military to purchase new combat technology and increase its fighting efficiency, including replacing the Royal Air Force's aging Hercules transports and Harrier jets and the navy's aging Invincible Class carriers.

*Source: Wess Mitchell, "Privatizing Defense: Britain Leads The Way," NCPA Brief Analysis No. 391, March 29, 2002, National Center for Policy Analysis, 12655 N. Central Expressway, Suite 720, Dallas, Texas 75243, (972) 386-6272.*

**TAKE-HOME PAY FROM \$1 OF EARNINGS**  
(For a Woman Married to a Successful Husband)



**Americans Fall Victim to the “Stealth Tax”**

The alternative minimum tax (AMT) was originally put in place in 1969 to assure that a handful of upper-income Americans — 155 of them, to be exact — paid some kind of annual federal income tax.

But since then, rapidly growing numbers of Americans have made the unhappy discovery that the AMT has sneaked up on them — hence the description “stealth tax.” They are finding that they owe much more to the Internal Revenue Service than they thought.

- The AMT traps people by reducing breaks allowed in the regular tax system and then taxing the remaining income at either a 26 percent or 28 percent rate.
- The alternative tax will affect 2.7 million this year — double the number just two years ago.
- In 2010, it will affect 35 million taxpayers — including most families with three or more children and incomes of \$100,000 or more.
- Those affected will lose two-thirds — or \$88 billion — of the Bush tax cuts in 2010.

As the number of taxpayers who get clobbered by the AMT grows, so too will the pressure on Congress to repeal it. But the cost to the government of doing away with the AMT also grows with each passing year. Treasury Department economists estimate that the 10-year cost of repeal now stands at \$619 billion — and is rising.

*Source: David Cay Johnston, “A ‘Stealth Tax’ Is Creeping Up on Growing Numbers of Americans,” New York Times, February 17, 2002.*

**Taxing Working Women**

Federal tax laws systematically discriminate against two-earner couples. This is a widespread problem, since today, 70 percent of married women — and 60 percent of women with children younger than age six — are in the labor market.

More than half of two-earner households suffer a marriage penalty. But the marriage penalty is not really a tax on marriage. Instead, it is a tax on two-earner couples. The person earning a lower wage — usually the wife — is automatically taxed at the spouse’s higher tax rate. Among the obstacles faced by working wives:

- When taxes are combined with the extra expenses of leaving home, the average married woman gets to keep only about one-third of what she earns. [See the figure.]
- Social Security is great for married women who don’t work because they receive benefits based on their husband’s

contributions; however, married women entering the labor market get very little in return for the extra Social Security taxes they pay.

- In general, employers cannot offer employees a choice between taxable wages and non-taxed benefits. This take-it-or-leave-it approach penalizes women who already have health insurance and other benefits through their husband’s employer.
- Parents today get very limited tax relief for the cost of child care, which offsets only a fraction of the real expenses.

In general, the highest marginal tax rates are paid by high-income women (because of their husband’s tax bracket) and low-income women (because of the withdrawal of welfare benefits and the Earned Income Tax Credit). High-income women respond to these incentives by choosing not to work. Low-income women choose not to marry.

*Source: Edward J. McCaffery, “Women and Taxes,” in Celeste Colgan, ed., Women’s Agenda (forthcoming, 2002), National Center for Policy Analysis, 12655 N. Central Expressway, Suite 720, Dallas, Texas 75243, (972) 386-6272.*

## No Way To Treat A Lady

Women almost always live longer than men, but they seldom live better. Their increased longevity not only makes it more likely that women will be alone in retirement, but also that they will live in poverty.

For example, elderly women are twice as likely as elderly men to live below the poverty level. That is why women, far more than men, need a retirement system consistent with the way they participate in the economy. Additionally:

- Because women are more likely to work part-time, they are less likely to qualify for an employer's pension program.
- Because they switch jobs more frequently and move in and out of the labor market more often (to have children or to care for family members) they are more likely to lose employer contributions to 401(k) retirement plans if they are not fully vested.
- Even if they are fully vested, job switching can cost them substantial benefits under traditional employer-sponsored, defined-benefit retirement programs.

For example, a woman who drops out of the labor market for as few as five years can end up with as much as 30 percent less in her defined contribution retirement program. Although some progress has been made, more needs to be done. Future remedies should include:

- Increasing allowable contributions to IRAs for those who do not have access to an employer-provided plan.
- Increasing opportunities for part-time workers to take advantage of tax-deferred savings.
- Providing maximum portability for retirement savings by reducing vesting periods.

*Source: Vickie L. Bajtelsmit, "Women as Retirees," in Celeste Colgan, ed., Women's Agenda (forthcoming, 2002), National Center for Policy Analysis, 12655 N. Central Expressway, Suite 720, Dallas, Texas 75243, (972) 386-6272.*

## Social Insecurity

Because Social Security and Medicare are pay-as-you-go programs, future taxpayers will receive no help from the so-called trust funds, which are only accounting devices that hold IOUs the government has written to itself.

"Pay as you go" means taxes taken from today's workers primarily pay benefits to today's retirees. Thus, as the number of retirees grows faster than the number of workers, today's workers' retirement benefits will be paid only if higher taxes are collected from the next generation. How high will those taxes have to be?

According to the annual report of the Trustees of the Social Security and Medicare Trust Funds intermediate (most likely) projections are:

- When today's 19-year-olds retire beginning in 2050, workers will face a payroll tax of 17 percent to pay Social Security retirement and disability benefits, currently funded by a 12.4 percent tax.
- If Medicare Part A (which mainly covers hospital expenses) is added, the payroll tax burden will be 24 percent — about a fourth of all income that workers will earn that year.
- Although Medicare Part B (which

mainly covers outpatient services) is funded from general revenues, expressed as a percent of payroll the burden will climb to 28 percent.

- Add the other medical bills for the elderly the federal government pays (Medicaid, the Veterans Health Administration, etc.) and the total burden rises to 32 percent.

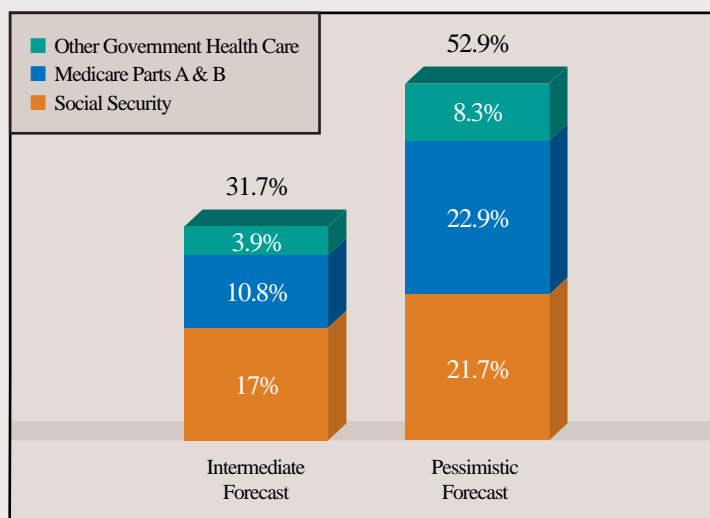
Thus almost one-third of future workers' incomes will be needed just to pay benefits to today's teenagers — on top of all other government services, from national defense to salaries for teachers and police officers.

Furthermore, under the trustees' pessimistic projection, by 2050 the total taxes needed to support elderly benefits will climb to 53 percent of taxable payroll — more than half of the incomes of future workers.

Most Social Security reform proposals would allow workers to invest a portion of their payroll taxes in a personal retirement account. Over time, the personal accounts would grow, assuming an increasing portion of the government's Social Security burden.

*Source: John C. Goodman and Matt Moore, "Analyzing The 2002 Social Security Trustees Report," NCPA Brief Analysis No. 394, April 15, 2002, National Center for Policy Analysis, 12655 N. Central Expressway, Suite 720, Dallas, Texas 75243, (972) 386-6272.*

### ELDERLY ENTITLEMENT BENEFITS IN 2050 (As a Percent of Taxable Payroll)



*Source: National Center for Policy Analysis and the "2002 Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Disability Insurance Trust Funds"*

## Testing Students Is Not Cost-Prohibitive

Testing students at regular intervals is the cornerstone of the accountability provisions of the new federal education reform law, but critics charge the process will be so costly it will amount to an unfunded federal mandate that will consume local education dollars.

The ‘No Child Left Behind Act’ (NCLB) provides nearly \$360 million in federal funds to cover the annual cost of testing. But the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) estimates the tests will cost the states as much as \$7 billion a year. Someone has miscalculated. Some of the evidence:

- A recent study by Accountability Works (AW) — a nonprofit policy research and consulting organization affiliated with the Education Leaders Council (ELC), a pro-reform group — estimates the yearly cost of testing for all the states will total \$312 million to \$388 million.

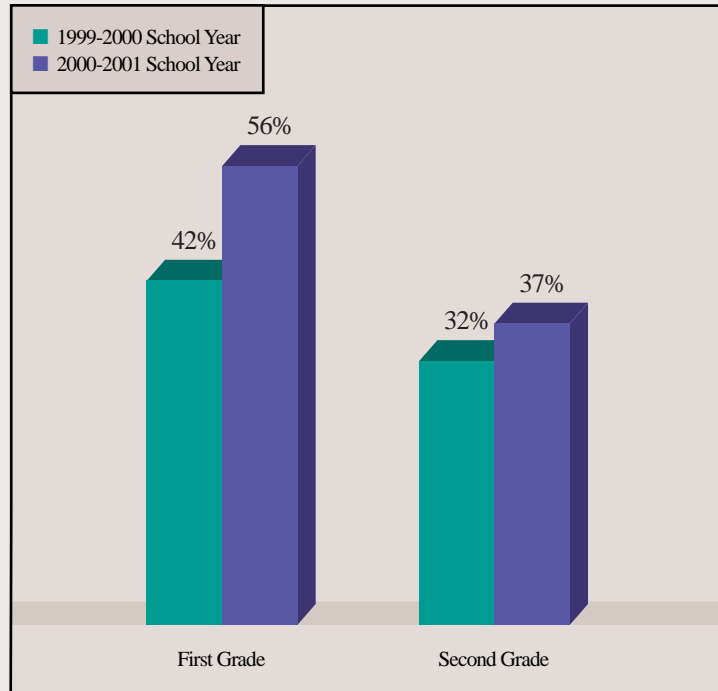
- AW projects that the average state will face annual cost increases between \$6.1 million and \$7.6 million, and will receive \$7.1 million in federal funds.

- The NASBE cost estimate was inflated, says AW, by the assumption that testing would cost \$25 to \$50 per student, when states typically pay vendors \$5 to \$15 per student for testing.

Researchers found other flaws in the NASBE estimate. For example, it used per student estimates to calculate test development costs despite the fact that such costs are largely fixed, regardless of the number of students to be assessed.

*Source: Theodor Rebarber and Thomson W. McFarland, “Estimated Cost of the Testing Requirements in the ‘No Child Left Behind Act,’” February 2002, Accountability Works, Education Leaders Council, 225 19th Street, N.W., Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 261-2600.*

## IMPROVEMENT IN LOS ANGELES STUDENTS’ READING SCORES UNDER PHONICS PROGRAM



## Phonics Prevails Over Whole Language

California officials are dumping “whole language” reading programs and returning to phonics-based instruction, largely because of reading scores that are among the nation’s worst. The state has adopted two reading programs that emphasize sounding out vowels and consonants.

While the state policy does not require all schools to use the phonics programs, it does provide a powerful incentive to do so. These are the only two reading programs that the state will fund. There is plenty of compelling evidence that phonics-based instruction works:

- In Los Angeles, schools with the poorest results in reading were ordered to adopt systemic phonics in the first two grades two years ago.

- First-grade reading scores soared to the 56th percentile nationally for the 2000-2001 school year, from the 42nd percentile the year before.

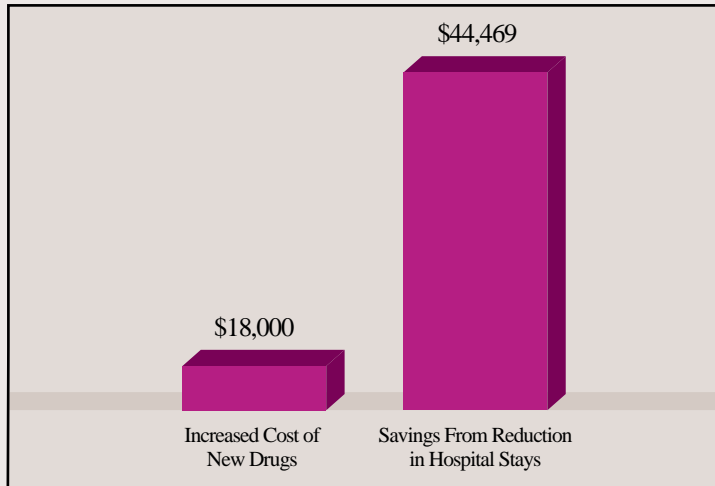
- Scores in the second grade climbed to the 37th percentile from the 32nd — with similar gains in standing of 10 to 20 percent for Los Angeles students through fifth grade, where explicit phonics had not yet been adopted.

- The progress was registered despite severe school overcrowding and one-quarter of teachers lacking formal credentials to teach.

The school district is now emphasizing teacher training. The shift to phonics also coincided with passage of a law mandating an end to bilingual education.

*Source: Diana Jean Schemo, “California Leads Chorus of Sounded-Out Syllables,” New York Times, February 9, 2002.*

### COST AND SAVINGS FROM REPLACING 1,000 OLD-DRUG PRESCRIPTIONS WITH NEW DRUGS



Source: National Bureau of Economic Analysis.

## Benefits Outweigh Costs of Newer Drugs

Americans spend significantly more on prescription medications than they did in the mid-1980s. One reason is that newer, more expensive drugs are replacing older ones. For example, the average 1998 price for drugs introduced in 1992 or later was \$71.49 per prescription, compared to \$30.47 for previously existing drugs. However, research shows these newer drugs are better.

- Data from the 1996 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) showed that replacing older drugs with newer ones increased average prescription costs by about \$18.

- However, people taking the new drugs were significantly less likely to die by the end of the survey than those taking older medications.

- They were also significantly less likely to miss days at work than people taking old drugs.

Reducing the age of drugs cuts all types of non-drug medical expenses, but the biggest cost reduction comes in hospital expenditures, which account for nearly 42 percent of total medical expense. For example,

- Replacing 1,000 old prescriptions with 1,000 new prescriptions will increase drug costs by \$18,000 but it will reduce the number of hospital stays by nearly six.

- Since the average cost of a hospital stay is \$7,588, fewer stays would reduce costs by \$44,469.

The notion that individuals should use less expensive generic drugs to reduce health costs is a penny-wise, pound-foolish proposition. Evidence suggests that denying people access to newer drugs increases total treatment costs and leads to worse outcomes.

Source: Frank Lichtenberg, "The Benefits and Costs of Newer Drugs: Evidence from the 1996 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey," NBER Working Paper No. 8147, March 2001, National Bureau of Economic Research, 1050 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138, (617) 868-3900.

## Free Market Physician Care

A problem common to large, high-volume medical practices is the reimbursement amounts received from insurance companies. On the average, these reimbursements total just over half the listed price for an office visit. But extensive and costly paperwork is still required to process patient claims, resulting in enormous overhead expenses.

One team of physicians decided to take action. They streamlined a bureaucratic, unprofitable practice to accept reduced cash payments rather than bill myriad insurance companies. The physicians called their program SimpleCare, and the results have been impressive:

- For each minute a doctor spends caring for a patient, seven minutes are required to comply with administrative requirements under insurance and managed care contracts.

- However, by using cash payments, under SimpleCare seven minutes of patient care require only one minute of paperwork.

- Profit per patient visit rose to \$10 — from a loss of \$7 per visit.

The doctors simply capitalized on an existing market. An estimated 50 million Americans pay cash for physician visits, either because they are uninsured or because their health policies have high deductibles. On the spot billing is easier and more efficient. None of the verification of insurance plan conditions and coding required under managed care is necessary. Thanks to SimpleCare, the practice was able to reduce the base price of a physician visit to less than the average insurance reimbursement. The doctors found a free market solution to their problem, and everyone came out a winner.

Source: Vern S. Cherewatenko, "The SimpleCare Story," *Health Care News*, February 2002, Heartland Institute, 19 South LaSalle, No. 903, Chicago, Ill. 60603, (312) 377-4000.

## Rent Control Fails in Frisco

Rent-control laws, designed to help the poor and the homeless, instead exacerbate their already dire plight, but they often provide a boon to upper income renters. San Francisco is the latest in the long line of cities to learn the unintended consequences of rent control laws, including:

- A recently published study found that 26 percent of the households living in rent-controlled apartments have incomes of \$100,000 or more.
- Rents today are more than five times what they were in 1979, when rent control was instituted.
- The average apartment rent in the city today is \$2,100 a month, and even for a studio apartment, the average rent is \$1,500 a month.

Meanwhile, the people who were expected to benefit from rent control are departing the city in droves:

- Although San Francisco's total population is growing, the number of children in the city has declined absolutely.
- More than three-quarters of the households in rent-controlled apartments have no children at all.

Rent control laws never fail to fail. Housing shortages have followed rent control in cities across the United States, as well as in Europe, Asia and Australia.

Source: Thomas Sowell, "The Housing Farce," *Townhall.com*, February 7, 2002.

## Living High on a Living Wage

The so-called living wage is again a hot debate topic. For some years, groups like ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) have pushed hard to get their interpretation of living wage laws enacted in cities and counties across the country. The first living wage ordinance was put in place in Baltimore in 1994. Now more than 60 jurisdictions have one. But exactly what constitutes a living wage, and who most deserves to receive one, remains a wide-open question. Consider:

- Typically, living wage laws require city contractors to pay their employees a wage significantly higher than the minimum wage as a condition for doing business with the city.
- Living wage rates are often tied to the poverty-level income for a family of four, which was \$17,761 per year in 2000, or just \$8,959 for a single person.
- Thus, one net effect of a living wage law is to pay single people and two-

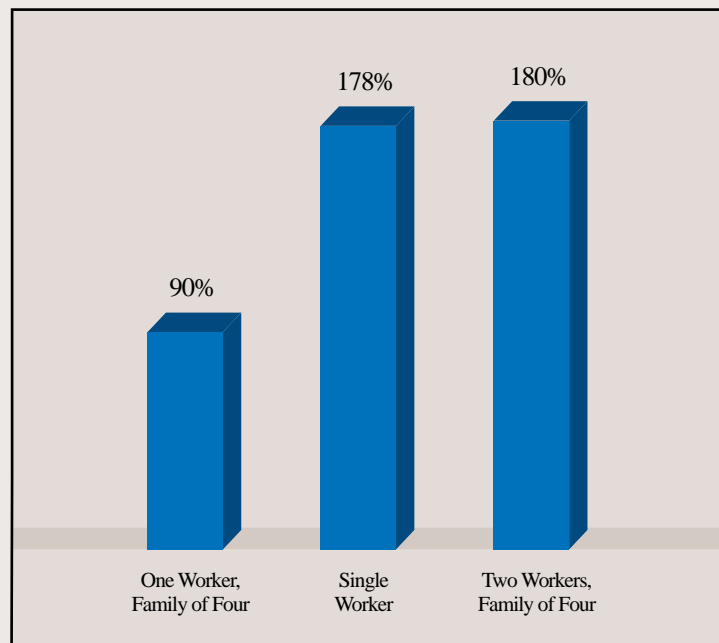
earner couples considerably more than a living wage, as defined by the poverty level.

A big part of the living wage argument is buttressed by flawed logic. For example, it is preposterous to assume there will be just one wage earner in a four-person family. But this is precisely the assumption living wage advocates make.

It is taxpayers who lose from the so-called living wage. They first foot the bill for the wage increases in the form of higher product prices. When layoffs occur, they again must chip in to subsidize the unemployed. And when the whole house of cards tumbles, they will see their community tax base shrink as fed-up businesses shutter their doors and relocate to more hospitable economic environs.

Source: Bruce Bartlett, senior fellow, National Center for Policy Analysis, March 20, 2002; see David Neumark, "How Living Wage Laws Affect Low-Wage Workers and Low Income Families," March 2002, Public Policy Institute of California, 500 Washington Street, Suite 800, San Francisco, California 94111, (415) 291-4400.

### LOS ANGELES "LIVING WAGE" AS A PERCENT OF POVERTY LEVEL



Note: Federal poverty level in 2000 was \$8,959 for a single person; \$17,761 for a family of four. Assumes wage rate of \$7.69 per hour.

Source: Public Policy Institute of California.

## Horse-trading Environmental Restrictions

Individuals and corporations prohibited from developing their land due to environmental regulations can make it pay another way. When a project would alter or disrupt wetlands, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers can require what is called “mitigation.” This means other wetlands must either be created, restored or protected. The result: a thriving wetlands development industry whereby companies enhance or restore wetlands and sell “mitigation credits” to needy developers.

- The General Accounting Office estimates that developers have paid \$64 million to mitigate damage on 1,440 acres of wetlands.

- The National Academy of Sciences estimates that from 1993 to 2000 more than 24,000 acres were subject to mitigation, with permit fees alone costing more than \$1 billion.

Entrepreneurs are using similar mechanisms to profit from other land considered unfeasible to develop due to environmental restrictions. For instance:

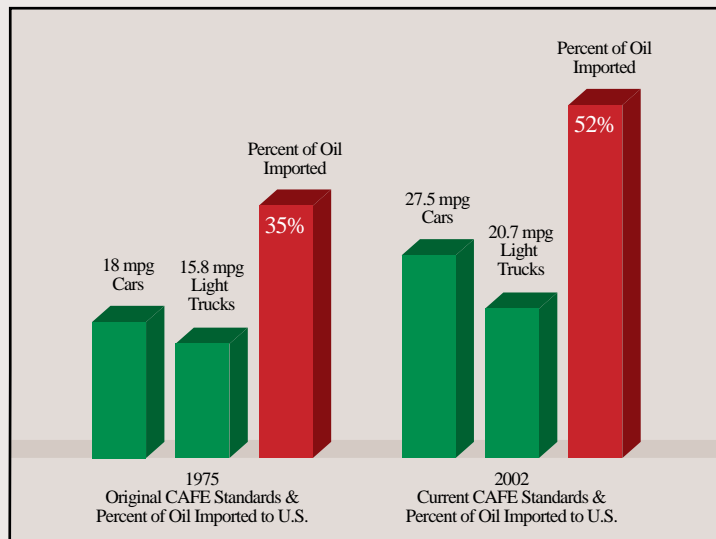
- Although Glenn Hawes couldn't develop his 900 acres for housing, he was able to create a mitigation bank containing as many as 150 mitigation credits, five of which he has sold to other developers for between \$65,000 and \$70,000 apiece.

- And when the Corps refused to allow Allegheny Power to develop a hydroelectric power plant that threatened some wetlands, Allegheny sold the land to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for \$16 million — its value as real estate — and took a \$16.6 million “bargain sale” tax credit for the acreage's marketable environmental values.

Many environmentalists argue that the lands preserved or restored through mitigation are not as ecologically valuable as those developed. Others argue that forcing developers to shoulder the cost of wetlands or habitat destruction — on average \$44,000 per acre — may cause them to reconsider the projects' viability.

Source: Ricardo Bayon, “A bull market in ... Woodpeckers?” *Milken Institute Review*, First Quarter 2002, Milken Institute, 1250 4th Street, Santa Monica, Calif. 90401, (310) 998-2600.

## CAFE's FAILURE TO REDUCE FOREIGN OIL CONSUMPTION



## The CAFE Standards Canard

Congress again has its sights set on raising the federal Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standard, which requires auto manufacturers to meet certain mileage standards. Advocates want to raise the current CAFE standard of 27.5 mpg for cars and 20.7 mpg for light trucks to 40 mpg for both.

They say this will increase energy “security” and reduce global warming. However, evidence suggests that raising CAFE standards will not reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil, and will not affect global warming. It will, however, result in needless, preventable deaths.

- Although domestic new car fuel economy has increased 114 percent since 1974, and light truck fuel economy has increased 56 percent, people are driving twice as many miles, on average, and imported oil has risen from 35 percent of U.S. consumption to more than 52 percent.

- The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that car and light truck emissions in the U.S. make up,

at most, 1.5 percent of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions — and raising CAFE standards to 40 mpg would reduce those vehicles' greenhouse gas output by less than one-half of 1 percent — a negligible amount.

- And a study by the National Academy of Sciences found that higher CAFE standards could actually be counterproductive in fighting global warming because the use of lighter-weight materials could cause “indirect energy consumption” that “could substantially offset decreases of those emissions achieved through improved fuel economy.”

There are also safety concerns. Researchers at Harvard University and the Brookings Institution have found that, on average, every 100 pounds shaved off new cars to meet CAFE standards results in between 440 and 780 additional people killed in auto accidents — a total of 2,200 to 3,900 lives lost per year.

Source: H. Sterling Burnett, “CAFE's Three Strikes — It Should Be Out,” *NCPA Brief Analysis No. 388*, February 13, 2002, National Center for Policy Analysis, 12655 N. Central Expressway, Suite 720, Dallas, Texas 75243, (972) 386-6272.

## Faith-Based Organizations Help People Find Jobs

Workforce investment agencies in five U.S. cities have directed some part of their federal funding to faith-based organizations to provide employment-related services, according to a study by the Urban Institute funded by the U.S. Department of Labor.

- According to the Urban Institute's telephone survey, in 2000, employment service contracts with faith-based organizations ranged from \$36,000 to \$3.6 million in Fort Worth, Baltimore, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh and San Diego.

- Funding to faith-based organizations ranged from about one percent to 10 percent of the local workforce agencies' budgets.

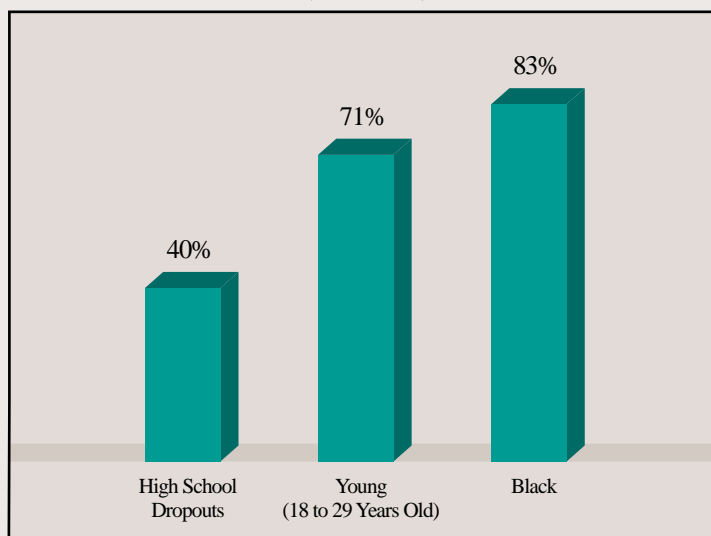
- In each city, one to three large church congregations reported sponsoring more formal employment-related services without public funding.

Most of the congregations contacted in the five cities did not provide formal, extensive or prolonged employment-related services. Instead, several reported they provide aid on a case-by-case basis to people who request or need help. The services included clothing for work, transportation, employment counseling, job mentors, basic computer training and job search assistance.

Of the non-profit agencies sponsored by faith-based organizations that were surveyed — such as homeless shelters, transitional housing facilities or social service agencies — nearly half received public funding and many provided employment-related services.

*Source: Demetra Smith Nightingale et al., "Faith-Based Organizations Providing Employment and Training Services: A Preliminary Exploration," February 1, 2002, Urban Institute, 2100 M Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037, (202) 833-7200.*

## INCREASE IN EMPLOYMENT OF DISADVANTAGED SINGLE MOTHERS DUE TO WELFARE REFORM (1996-2000)



*Source: June E. O'Neill and M. Anne Hill, "Gaining Ground: Women, Welfare Reform and Work," National Center for Policy Analysis, NCPA Policy Report No. 251, February 2002.*

## Without Welfare, Single Women Went To Work

When welfare reform passed in 1996, opponents warned of ominous consequences. Instead, the reform was a great success. In the five years following, the number of families on welfare has fallen 53 percent. Acting in their own best interest, single mothers left welfare in unprecedented numbers and found gainful employment. In fact, the number of woman who found work very closely mirrors the number that have left welfare.

- Welfare reform accounts for more than half of the decline in welfare participation since 1996, and more than 60 percent of the rise in employment among single mothers.

- By contrast, the contribution of a booming economy was only 20 percent.

Opponents predicted that only the easiest cases would find work, leaving the hardest cases behind. However, employment gains, and a resulting decline in welfare participation, have been largest among disadvantaged single mothers:

- Welfare reform accounts for 40 percent of employment gains among high school

dropouts, 71 percent of increased employment among women ages 18 to 29 years and 83 percent among black women.

- Prior to passage of reform legislation, welfare caseloads had more than doubled since the 1960s.

*Source: June O'Neill and M. Anne Hill, "Gaining Ground: Women, Welfare Reform and Work," in Celeste Colgan, ed., Women's Agenda (forthcoming, 2002), National Center for Policy Analysis, 12655 N. Central Expressway, Suite 720, Dallas, Texas 75243, (972) 386-6272.*

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