In a dispute primarily over provisions related to farm supports, the $171 billion farm bill was defeated by Senate Republicans on December 19th, preventing its passage before the pending recess. The bill contained food stamp program provisions that would have provided funding for the program of $3.6 to $6.2 billion, and, if Senator Lugar (R-IN) had been able to amend the bill with his nutrition title, would have provided $12.4 billion to the program, which has suffered cuts over recent years. The bill also contained provisions that would have benefited families in other important ways (see September 2001 Policy Briefing at www.cffpp.org for a summary of the bill). It is not clear at this point when or in what form a farm bill will be introduced. Congress has until October 2002 to reauthorize the Food Stamp Program.

Various methods for calculating the high school dropout rate can lead to significant understatement of the rate, according to a recent report, *High School Graduation Rates in the United States*, by Jay P. Greene (November 2001).

The primary findings of the report include:

- The national graduation rate for the class of 1998 was 74%. For white students the rate was 78%, while it was 56% for African-American students and 54% for Latino students.
- Wisconsin had the second highest graduation rate nationally at 87%, but the lowest graduation rate among African-American students at 40%.
- Less than 50% of African-American students graduated in seven states and less than 50% of Latino students graduated in eight states for which data were available.
- The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) counts GED graduates and relies on a methodology that is likely to undercount dropouts, accounting for the difference between the NCES rate of 86% for the class of 1998 compared to the report’s finding of a 74% rate.

The report was prepared by the Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute, an otherwise conservative think tank with a goal of increasing the implementation of school voucher programs. In spite of its possible link to the goal of promoting school vouchers, the author has crafted a potentially helpful method for calculating the high school graduation rate than is used by the Education Department, and one that can more accurately portray discrepancies in graduation rates by race. The Department itself has reviewed and does not dispute the methodology used in the report. It is available on-line at [www.manhattan-institute.org](http://www.manhattan-institute.org).
The Bush administration is proposing to eliminate the 10 regional offices of the U.S. Department of Labor Women s Bureau and maintain only the national office in Washington, D.C. The move follows recommendations from a Heritage Foundation proposal that would also phase out the Bureau of International Labor Affairs, the Civil Rights Office and the national office of the Women s Bureau.

The U.S. Department of Labor Women s Bureau, established by Congress in 1920, is the only federal agency mandated to represent the needs of wage-earning women in the public policy process. For 81 years, the Bureau has been meeting that mandate - identifying the issues working women care about most and vigorously pioneering research and remedies to address them.

If interested in supporting continuance of the Women s Bureau individuals or organizations could email or write their federal legislators. It is important that this be done before Congress breaks for the Christmas holidays. For more information or to view a sample letter, click on the following attachments (apologies to fax subscribers):

A recent report from the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) addresses the complicated system of determining eligibility among separate but related public assistance programs, concluding that the process creates barriers for otherwise eligible applicants and is cumbersome and error-prone for caseworkers. The programs studied include Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Food Stamps, Medicaid, the Child Care and Development Fund, and 7 other programs representing in total 70% of public expenditures for means-tested programs. The GAO analyzed financial eligibility rules in each of the 11 programs, interviewed agency officials and conducted site visits in 5 states for the report. Among the findings:

- The primary sources of variation in eligibility rules across programs are at the federal level in statutes and regulations, although states and localities have some discretion in TANF and Medicaid rules. Variations exist among programs in income limits, in whose income is counted or excluded, in whether certain expenses are deducted in calculating income, and in limits on the assets that are allowed.
- Variation and complexity in financial eligibility rules contribute to processes that are often duplicative and cumbersome for both caseworkers and applicants.
- The separate eligibility processes involve a substantial duplication of administrative functions and impose demands on the time and resources of applicants. A family in the states reviewed for the report that wanted to apply for all 11 programs would need to complete anywhere from 6 to 8 applications and visit up to six offices.
- The applications often require applicants to repeatedly provide much of the same information.
- The cost of simplifying or realigning financial eligibility rules is a long-standing and major obstacle according to federal, state and local officials. The interviewed
officials expressed a concern that if the rules are simplified it would result in more eligible families and higher resulting costs. The Office of Management and Budget, in particular, commented that simplification should not be a license to expand eligibility and increase spending beyond current levels.


Continuing to build on a growing body of research that suggests that time limits and a worsening economy are pushing families deeper into poverty, are the following reports:

- **An Issue Brief (#171) from the Economic Policy Institute, *Last Hired, First Fired: Job Losses Plague Former TANF Recipients***, states that:
  - The industries in which former welfare recipients were most likely to find employment have suffered the most unemployment in the current recession. Former welfare recipients are likely to be the first laid-off, and will have more difficulty finding employment now than in the late 1990s.
  - The typical service sector jobs worked by many former welfare recipients are low-wage and intermittent, which means that these workers are not building up employment histories required for Unemployment Insurance benefits. Time limits will mean that many of these families are no longer eligible for welfare assistance, either.
  - As states face increasing caseloads, they will not be likely to have sufficient funds earmarked for cash assistance. Over the past five years, many states have diverted TANF funds into programs such as child care and transportation. Only 43% of TANF block-grant funds are used for cash assistance nationally. The report is available on line at [www.epinet.org](http://www.epinet.org).

- **The End of Welfare as They Knew It: What Happens When Welfare Recipients Reach Their Time Limits**, from the Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change, compares welfare recipients who leave because of time limits to those who leave for other reasons in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. The study finds that:
  - Recipients who reached time limits are likely to be among the most challenged individuals with respect to achieving labor market success or finding alternative sources of income.
  - Along many different dimensions, persons who leave welfare because of time limits are worse off than those who leave for other reasons along many different dimensions, including every measure of income, relationships with their children, greater likelihood of eviction and of living in over-crowded housing.
  - Among non-time limited leavers, more than 20% returned to cash assistance by six months following their initial exits. The most common reason for return was a lost job. The report is available at [http://povertycenter.cwru.edu](http://povertycenter.cwru.edu).

- **Disappearing Wisconsin Welfare Recipients: Where Did They Go?** from the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute makes the striking finding that starting in 1991, women who had received AFDC in 1990 began to disappear from the state records.
- More than 24,000 women who left welfare did not receive more welfare assistance, did not work in jobs covered by Unemployment Insurance in Wisconsin, and were not in the main state records.
- Those who disappeared had lower earnings in the year before they disappeared than in their best year of income. Instead of returning to assistance as their income declined, however, they gave up assistance altogether. They also used less Food Stamps and Medicaid prior to disappearing.
- The authors were unable to determine what happened to the women but suggest that if a large number of the 24,000 missing women did leave the state, it means that there are fewer women who might reappear asking for help in the current recession. That would be good news for a state that is facing a large budget shortfall.

The report is available at www.wpri.org.

- And for anyone interested in the human stories behind some of these reports, please read the following article from the New York Times:

  As Welfare Comes to an End, So Do the Jobs

  -RM

Resource for Building Relationships With and Self-Esteem of Daughters Available

Dads and Daughters is a national, nonprofit membership organization of fathers and daughters. DADs provides tools to strengthen father-daughter relationships and to transform the pervasive messages that value daughters more for how they look than who they are. The organization emphasizes both relationships between fathers and daughters and the development of healthy self-esteem.

If you would like to obtain more information or contact the organization, go to their website at www.dadsanddaughters.org. You may also sign up to receive a free bi-weekly email update at the site.  

-RM

Please Note: The next Policy Briefing will appear in February 2002.