

Republican Themes for Subcommittee Hearing on SSI and Refugees

March 22, 2007

- 1. The 1996 welfare reforms focused means-tested benefits on citizens of the United States, as well as noncitizens who have worked and paid taxes in the U.S. for a number of years.**
- 2. At the same time, Congress provided special treatment for refugees, who often flee their country with few possessions.**
 - a. In 1996 refugees were guaranteed access to means-tested benefits like SSI, food stamps and Medicaid during their first 5 years in the U.S.
 - b. In 1997 refugees were provided an additional two years of benefits – for a total of seven years of benefit checks after arrival here. The premise of this extension was to provide enough time for refugees to become citizens, maintaining their eligibility for benefit checks.
 - c. During these seven years taxpayers provide each refugee as much as \$50,000 in SSI cash benefits, plus the value of food, housing, health care or other benefits they might receive.
- 3. Some are now arguing seven years of benefits is not enough.**
 - a. Some suggest refugees need more time to naturalize, due to delays in processing citizenship applications.
 - i. A class action lawsuit in Federal court in Philadelphia argues refugees seeking to become U.S. citizens have lost SSI benefits due to delays in the naturalization process.
 - ii. Continuing benefits beyond 7 years while a citizenship application is pending would be consistent with current law and relatively affordable (about \$35 million over 5 years).
 - b. Others argue all refugees should be guaranteed additional years of SSI benefits, regardless of whether they are trying to become citizens. Such proposals have higher costs: one year extension (\$80 million over 5 years), two year extension (between \$150 million and \$250 million), or permanent extension (\$600 million).
 - c. Any consideration of those policies must include consideration of ways to pay for those additional benefits.