SOCIAL SECURITY INCREASES FOR CHILDREN

Two weeks ago, I proposed legislation to bring the greatest improvement in living standards for those covered under social security since that historic act was passed in 1935.

While this program extends primarily to the older Americans, it also covers a child if the family breadwinner, who is under social security, dies, retires, or becomes disabled.

Today, more than 3 million children receive social security payments. Their average benefit is only $52 a month.

To provide more adequate payments to these children, I recommend legislation to enlarge their benefits—with an average increase of at least 15 percent.

IMPROVING CHILD ASSISTANCE

Enacted during the 1930's, the "Aid to Families with Dependent Children" (AFDC) program is a major source of help for the poor child. Under AFDC, Federal financial aid is provided to States to help needy families with children under 21.

There are serious shortcomings in this program:

Only 3.2 million children received benefits last year.

Twelve million children in families below the poverty line received no benefits.

Thirty-three States do not even meet their own minimum standards for subsistence.

Seven States offer a mother and three children $120 a month or less.

Only 21 States have taken advantage of a 1962 law, expiring this year, allowing children with unemployed parents to receive financial assistance. Only 12 States have community work and training programs for unemployed parents to give them the skills needed to protect their family and earn a decent living. A number of States discourage parents from working by arbitrarily reducing welfare payments when they earn their first dollar.

To remedy these deficiencies and give the poorest children of America a fair chance, I recommend legislation to—

Require each State to raise cash payments to the level the State itself sets as the minimum for subsistence, to bring these minimum standards up to date annually, and to maintain welfare standards at not less than two-thirds the level set for medical assistance.

Provide special Federal financial assistance to help poorer States meet these new requirements.

Make permanent the program for unemployed parents, which expires this year.

Require each State receiving assistance to cooperate in making community work and training available.

Require States to permit parents to earn $50 each month, with a maximum of $150 per family, without reduction in assistance payments.

Even well-established State welfare programs lack adequate services to protect children where there is physical abuse or neglect. There should be protection for the child as well as help for the parent. Other State child welfare programs should expand day-care and homemaker services. New services must be tested, particularly for the mentally