

It was, therefore, with very great satisfaction that I saw the President's statement, as you did, in his March 14 poverty message in which he set out very clearly the necessity of doing something about garnishment and asked that a study be made by the Attorney General, the Secretary of Labor, and the Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity.

The study is being made and it isn't completed. I think probably it should be completed before there is definitive action in this particular area.

Strongly as I feel about the necessity of correcting this situation, I feel equally strongly we have to do the right thing about it, and by the right thing I mean whatever will be most effective. We know enough of the law on this subject to know that garnishment developed after we had prohibited imprisonment for debt. We left an opening and we don't want to do that again. This is not a simple subject. There are some hard questions. As an illustration, there is the question of whether there should be exemptions to any prohibition, of garnishment in the case of family debts—obligations such as alimony, child care, and so forth. That is not an easy one.

The experience of the States, of course, has been very extensive on this subject. It presents the question of whether there should be a prohibition or whether there should be a protection of a minimum wage. The experience in the States also presents the question of whether another effective remedy would be to prohibit discharge of an employee for having his wage garnished.

I originally thought the later was perhaps the answer. But now I don't think it is. I think that that puts the employer into an impossible position. So, I doubt that that's the answer. I think there is a serious question of what we do about wage assignments if we are going to prohibit garnishment, and I have listed some of those matters in my statement. I only say this, Madam Chairman and members of the committee, I think it is constructive counsel to suggest that there is still some more information to be obtained and some debate to take place with respect to how we may most effectively deal with the garnishment problem.

I suggest that, not as a counsel of delay, but as a counsel of doing the thing right. I come to the conclusion that there is more consideration which should be given to this matter than we can give now.

In concluding this summary, Madam Chairman and members of the committee, I think the country is in your debt for these last 2 weeks of illumination of this subject.

When I look back over the record of these hearings I realize that it is just almost incredible that we have waited this long to be this frank about something so important as this whole credit business.

I wish I could add more to it, and I stop only out of respect for what has already been developed and invite, with Mrs. Peterson, who is experienced in this area, I hardly need mention, whatever questions you have.

(The Secretary's full statement follows:)

STATEMENT OF W. WILLARD WIRTZ, SECRETARY OF LABOR

Madam Chairman and members of the subcommittee, there is legitimate question at this point whether much more can be said, without burdening the record unduly, about H.R. 11601.