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Patty Kastelic

Scott Sterling, interviewer

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Scott Sterling asked Patty Kastelic about social services and government involvement. Kastelic talked about the historical role of government in social services and the means test for the deserving poor. She said these are set when programs are designed. Very early on residency requirements were incorporated. In 1929 after the stock market crashed social welfare became a real issue. There was an attitude of trying anything to help alleviate the distress that was being felt. Out of this came the 1935 Social Security Act, aid to dependent children, unemployment compensation, rehabilitation and aid to the elderly. Most of these programs are still with us in one form or another.

Sterling asked about state and local programs before the New Deal. Kastelic said the state and local governments had the major burden prior to the Depression. They were paying twice as much in social services compared to the federal government. In 1980 the federal government was paying four times as much as state and local governments. She explained the rational process for the development of social welfare policy. Politics is a part of this. Historically the poor, sick and disabled have less representation in government than the more affluent.

Sterling asked about the opinion of some that government has become too involved in providing social welfare. Kastelic talked about traditional attitudes about welfare in the past. She said programs have been implemented incrementally. They are generally left in place even if they aren't effective. Sterling asked about attitudes toward welfare programs today. Kastelic said it is very mixed. Most Americans believe it is an obligation of the government to provide for those who cannot provide for themselves. There is also the opinion that there is too much support for those that are undeserving. She said social welfare includes an entire range of programs.

Sterling asked about social programs at the federal level. Kastelic said if the Reagan Administration's policies are carried out there will be major changes. They would like programs returned to the state in the form of block grants. The states will need to develop plans for implementing. It will be up to the states' discretion. Kastelic said different states have different attitudes.

Sterling asked about changes in social services to what is now termed unacceptable behavior such as domestic violence and how has the state addressed these problems. Kastelic said in the state of Alaska they have a complex web of social service deliveries. She talked about the government departments and nonprofits working on social services. She mentioned groups needing attention such as senior citizens and single parents. The Department of Health and Human Services has several different divisions such as family services, aid to families with children, and old age assistance programs. The Department of Community and Regional Affairs also render assistance such as housing assistance, employment opportunities, and the Displaced Homemaker's Program. The last program has had all of its funding

removed by the Senate Finance Committee since they considered it a duplication of services. She is hoping the other finance committees will change that.

Sterling asked if there is any thought about increases when and if the federal changes occur. Kastelic said it would appear the Department of Health and Human Services will be responsible for the programs Reagan is talking about. She said right now they are looking at restricted funding for programs. In combination with reductions at the state level they are looking at having reduced services. There will be hard choices to be made.

Sterling asked about other state agencies with institutional delivery of services. Kastelic said they are all interrelated. The Department of Revenue is responsible for the child support enforcement division. There are millions of unpaid child support monies. This is a cost to the state because the custodial parent without child support are forced very often to rely on aid programs. The Department of Public Safety is responsible for overseeing money to shelters and counseling agencies.

Sterling asked how well represented are the consumers of social services. Kastelic said traditionally they are poorly represented. She said they will be watching the current budgetary process with interest.