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**THE CONTRACT WITH AMERICA: A FRAUD**

by Congressman Bernard Sanders

Let us be frank and honest with the American people. Newt Gingrich's Republican "Contract with America" is a fraudulent series of proposals which will make the wealthiest people in America wealthier, while causing intense pain and suffering for the weakest and most vulnerable members of our country.

At a time when the rich are getting richer, when the middle class is shrinking, and when poverty is growing, the "Contract with America" will provide huge tax breaks for millionaires while cutting back on programs that feed hungry children such as Food Stamps, the WIC program, and the School Lunch program. According to a recent study, more than half of the tax cuts in the Contract will go to individuals with incomes of \$100,000 or more. Almost one-third would go to individuals with incomes of \$200,000 or more.

Twenty-five percent of the elderly in this country live at or near the poverty level. Many, despite Medicare, cannot afford the prescription drugs they desperately need, or other health care needs. Many millions of other Americans have paid into the Social Security system throughout their entire working life - and expect the right to fully draw upon their benefits as they retire.

The "Contract With America" goes to war against America's seniors. The Balanced Budget Amendment will, without a shadow of a doubt, lead to the destruction of Social Security as we know it. With or without that Constitutional amendment, the "Contract With America" will slash Medicare, Medicaid, and nutritional programs for the elderly.

At a time when the Cold War is over, when Russia wants to join NATO, when China has been given MFN status and has received billions of dollars of investment from U.S. corporations, the "Contract with America" proposes to significantly **increase** military spending. In March, 1994 House Republicans proposed increasing defense spending by \$61 billion over a 5 year period.

Meanwhile, while supporters of the "Contract with America" want to increase the Star Wars program and other military efforts, millions of veterans who put their lives on the line to defend this country will see major cutbacks in their already underfunded programs. Further, millions of young people will find it impossible to attend college because of significant reductions in federal loans and grants.

The United States does have enormous problems which must be addressed and resolved. Unfortunately, except for the wealthy, the "Contract with America" accomplishes little.

For example, many of us believe that we must move forward toward a balanced budget - but that we can do it without destroying Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and other desperately needed programs. For us, moving toward a balanced budget means critically examining our extravagant military budget; cutting back on corporate welfare and tax breaks and subsidies for the rich; and eliminating useless or too expensive government programs. If we move forward in that direction we **can** solve the deficit problem.

Many of us believe that we **should** reform our welfare system - but not by throwing poor children into orphanages or low income families out on the streets as the "Contract With America" suggests. If we are serious about "work not welfare," than we must make certain that there are real jobs available, as well as adequate childcare and transportation. By increasing the minimum wage and by creating a jobs program which rebuilds our physical and human infrastructure, we **can** create real welfare reform which puts people to work at meaningful jobs - making the country better for everyone.

Many of us strongly believe in the concept of a Citizen Legislature - but we think that term limits are an ineffective and simplistic solution to the problem of unresponsive government. We believe, in fact, that the Congress cannot be made more responsive without **real** campaign finance reform which stops Big Money from dominating the political process. There is something very wrong with our political system when over 20% of the members of Congress are millionaires, and many more are dependent upon campaign contributions which come from the wealthy and the powerful. Not too surprisingly, the "Contract With America" has nothing to say about campaign finance reform or eliminating the influence of big money on our political system.

As Chairman of the House Progressive Caucus, I intend to play an active role in trying to defeat some of the most destructive aspects of the "Contract With America," and provide sound and meaningful alternatives. Together, we can create public policy which works for all the people, and not just the privileged few.