



# WELLSTONE DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL CLUB

RENEWING THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY FROM WITHIN

AN ADDENDUM TO THE VISION STATEMENT:

## A Caring Economy and Its Role in America's Future

*“The State cannot leave people’s lives in the hands of the market. The economy must be at the service of human beings, not human beings at the service of the economy.”*

— Nora Castaneda  
*at a conference sponsored by Global  
Women’s Strike, 2004*

The system of economic organization we call the market rests on many pillars such as government, laws, and education. It also rests on the “private” world of families and personal relationships (in all their multiple forms) and on the unpaid labor of caring for others. This unpaid labor, which sustains the lives of those who work for pay, is expressed in many ways: in housework, in raising children, and in nurturing spouses, partners, parents and friends. Such work makes a significant contribution to our economy and to society as a whole

Civil society, in balance with the market, rests in large part on caring labor, and on our ability to live in the world in mutual and cooperative relationships with each other. On the most personal level, this starts with the relationship between parents and children. This first and most basic nurturing relationship enables most of us to come into the world with a capacity to be loving and compassionate.

That capacity for mutuality and nurturance allows us to see ourselves as caretakers of the

earth rather than as physically separate from it and enables us to recognize our mutual interdependence. While we know that the world is a dangerous place, we also know that our safety and survival mean learning to live in partnership with others, not domination. Our caring connections help us recognize that it is important for us to take responsibility for others who do not share our good fortune. They allow us to find common ground and mutual respect with those in our community who have different religious, racial, ethnic, gender and sexual backgrounds than our own. They insist that we embrace social, political, and economic justice as central to the decisions we make as a society, including the protection of our planet’s atmosphere and natural ecosystems. These are moral as well as practical imperatives for us and future generations.

As a society, therefore, we view local, state, and national budgets not simply as financial, but as moral documents – documents that require us to take into consideration the ethical dimensions of the choices we make about how we spend our wealth and treasure. We can appreciate the tremendous productivity of the market while working towards a caring community. In looking at the bottom line, of course we consider efficiency and profit, but we also consider social responsibility to the earth and to each other.

When we speak of economic policy therefore, we must think in terms of how such policy impacts our personal and family lives and our

## An addendum to the Vision Statement: A Caring Economy ... cont'd

society as a whole. We must recognize the value of unpaid, caring labor and offer support for it in a variety of ways: flexible work hours, parental leaves, inexpensive child care, support for schools and for after school programs, shorter work hours, social security for homemakers, access to birth control and abortion and safe child birth, equal access to the legal benefits of marriage, and equal pay for women. A caring economy would also provide decent wages for caring labor that is now poorly paid, such as day care work, nursing, teaching, and social work. An economy that supported families and caring labor in these concrete ways would be one that did more than talk the talk of Family Values. It would be one that walked the walk as well.

What would it be like to live in a caring economy day by day? A caring economy would certainly involve more financial equity between rich and poor, and it might well mean a lower disposable income for those of us fortunate enough to have more than most of our fellow citizens. It would also mean deciding to allocate more of our resources, imagination, and initiative toward solving the problems we face as a society and less toward personal consumption for non-essential items. This would be a hard choice to make in our consumer culture. No one likes the idea of higher taxes, even progressive ones that would ask those individuals who make over \$200,000 a year, and corporations who make excessive profits, to pay their fair share. But taxes, along with smart, efficient management of such taxes, are one of the means to an end that we see as essential to protecting and strengthening a caring community. We need to make choices, moral as well as practical, about how to best use our resources. As members of a caring community, we believe it is

important to invest in creating excellent public schools for all of us, affordable housing, guaranteed access to medical care without the fear of losing health insurance, longer paid leaves for parents, shorter working hours so that families have time together, decent options for care when people get old – not just warehousing in inadequate nursing homes. We think it is important to invest in programs that will protect us from the effects of industrial toxins and climate change. We think we would all be better off with wage insurance and training programs to ease the transition from one job to another, and with secure and portable pensions, including the Social Security system as it was originally envisioned – a public insurance system in which one generation took care of the next by keeping the elderly from falling into poverty.

Do Americans really want an uncaring economy – a society and a world in which only the fittest survive and prosper? Do we wish to live in a society where there is no collective safety net? Do we really want Government to refuse to intervene, or to do so incompetently, when it comes to our collective economic health? Or do we want a world in which everyone can take pleasure and joy in what we share? We need to make a choice in this country about the way we want to live – about what is truly important to us, about what we need to do to enable our children and their children to live meaningful and productive lives. Every choice we make as a society has consequences for each of us every day. We are responsible, both personally and collectively, for those choices. We are told there is no money for such things, but we are the richest country in the world. We can afford to choose a caring economy.



### **Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club**

P.O. Box 65, Berkeley, CA 94701-0065

(510) 262-1001 <http://wellstoneclub.org/>