

Welfare fares not well

Ease of system abuse ensures needy are not served

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If you're like most people, you've probably never collected unemployment, or have blown your cover by quoting items off the ninety-nine cent, extra value menu.

The working population seldom realizes that life is nothing more than a makeshift game of monopoly, and unemployment benefits are not unlike the \$200 you get for passing GO (conversely, if you ever end up in monopoly jail, don't expect good sodomy from the boot or the cruiseliner).

Despite my general aversion to government-regulated programs, (KidFit, I'm coming to kill you), firsthand experience has taught me that unemployment benefits are beyond reproach.

As a result of the current system, being unemployed in no way hampers an individual's money-making potential (stripping away your dignity it does, so again it helps to remember the part about the money).

Established in 1935, unemployment insurance was one of several desperate measures proposed by the federal Social Security Act, put forth in an effort to preserve the nation's economic stability.

Despite minimum guidelines set by the federal government, authority resides at the state level with respect to unemployment initiatives.

Each state is responsible for — or rather at liberty to — determine its own eligibility requirements, the amount of benefits paid and whether or not to bring back Ice-T as the spokesperson for a Drug Free America.

At present, unemployment benefits allow Hawaii's jobless to line their pockets with 57% of their previously earned income — a percentage based on the individual's highest quarter earnings.

Moreover, this figure translates over a six-month period, or for those just fired from McDonald's, that's 26 downs-tingling episodes of the Spiderman / Hercules Weekend Adventure Hour.

University of Hawai'i senior Alex McIntosh, ("Slackintosh" to his coworkers), had this to say about unemployment, "Nothing quite compares to the excitement of opening up the mailbox to find that discrete brown paper packaging at the end of each month."

(As the interview progressed, however, I suspected that Alex was not alluding to his unemployment checks, but to something else entirely).

Critics of the program argue that recipients become too dependent on government handouts and are therefore tempted to ride the gravy train for as long as they can. To others, the term "unemployment benefits" may seem to negate itself, like "tears of joy" or "asthma house-party."

Nevertheless, eight million out-of-work Americans collected benefits in 1997 (This figure would be more current if I had spent more Internet time researching and less time chasing down pictures of naked celebrities).

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, "[unemployment] benefits are paid as a matter of right and are not based on need," much like an individual's right to bear arms: both are synonymous with teen pregnancy Jeff Gordon collector plates.

While the unemployed are certainly entitled to fair compensation, state governments have set forth a few conditions of their own. For benefits to even take effect, a continued claim must be filed "for each week that [one wishes] to receive benefits," and that these claims must be filed on time. Oh the bureaucracy!

How does the government go about financing this tightfisted operation? Every year a specific payroll tax is levied on employers and the revenues go to replenish a fund from which benefits are later distributed. While this expense is likely to be passed on to employees in the form of pay discounts, it is of little consequence to those already earning the state's minimum wage.

In my opinion, the ease in which benefits can be collected further exacerbates a problem that unemployment

insurance first sought to alleviate. Yes, this article would have been significantly shorter had I taken the time to state my thesis at the very outset. Such is life.