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THE NEED FOR A PRO-FAMILY POLICY

What has Ronald Reagan done for women and families? Reagan did the best thing of all — he stopped inflation. The Carter inflation fell hardest on the working poor and the lower middle class families who could not keep up with rising prices on their modest salaries.

The liberals in the Democratic camp and in the media who keep up a running attack on Reagan for his spending cuts are missing the most important part of the economic story. The losses from spending cuts must be balanced against the gains in the real earnings of workers because of the drop in the inflation rate.

If inflation had not been curbed by Reaganomics, the real wages of workers would have been about five percent lower in 1982. In contrast to the $15 billion in social spending cuts, the reduction in inflation put about $90 billion more in the pockets of American workers. This is six times the social spending reductions.

We've heard a lot about the "feminization of poverty," the catch phrase to complain about the fact that more people in poverty are women. But family composition affects poverty far more than spending cuts or discrimination combined.

It is true that half of the female-headed (single-parent) households are in poverty. But most of this poverty is caused by divorce or out-of-wedlock births.

"Poverty" is one of those things that we know when we see it, but it is difficult to define in monetary terms or compare one year with another. When you compare income and standard of living figures in different years, the comparisons are subject to vast variables in value of the dollar, tax rates, inflation rates, interest rates, and government benefits in cash and in-kind.

So, a new piece of jargon has come into the economists' lexicon: "latent poverty." That means the percent of the "dependent population" — those people who would be poor if cash and in-kind benefits were not provided by the government.

Our country was doing quite well in reducing latent poverty (the percentage of the

population that is dependent) until President Lyndon Johnson started to wage his "War on Poverty." Poverty has been increasing ever since.

Latent poverty declined from 1950 to the late 1960s. Soon after the onset of the LBJ Great Society programs (and even in the middle of an economic boom), latent poverty began to grow. It was 18 percent in 1968, 19 percent by 1972, and 22 percent by 1980.

The Great Society handouts did not lead to greater family cohesion among the poor, as the liberals promised, but to family dissolution. Males began dropping out of the labor force in great numbers, and this was accompanied by a doubling of the divorce rate and the separation rate.

Out-of-wedlock births rose from 6 percent to 10 percent among whites, and from 38 percent to 55 percent among blacks. The rise in the percentage of out-of-wedlock births occurred even in states which used tax funds to pay for abortions, contraceptive programs, and sex education classes. Dr. Victor Fuchs of Stanford concludes that about half of today's out-of-wedlock births are due to the financial and leisure appeal of welfare.

Unfortunately, although government frequently subsidizes abortions and out-of-wedlock births, the "adoption option" is not funded at all, and is usually not even discussed at government-financed counseling centers.

Dissolution of the family is not a decision that affects merely those who make personal decisions. A Rand Corporation study shows that 36 percent of the inmates of state prisons grew up in one-parent households and 17 percent in "other arrangements" than a two-parent family.

On the other hand, only 19 percent of the general population grew up in a single-parent household and only 4 percent grew up in the "other arrangement" category.

A dozen other social ills have accompanied family dissolution, particularly those that affect young people: suicide, drug abuse, alcoholism, and VD. By cutting the inflation rate, however, Ronald Reagan has done the best thing the Federal Government can do for the stability of families.

Unlike his liberal predecessors, Ronald Reagan understands George Orwell's ominous warning. In 1984 he said, "Big Brother systematically undermines the family.... We have cut the links between child and parent.... There will be no love, except for the love of Big Brother."