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Conservative Ideas Get Liberal Endorsement

The liberals still have the majority of votes in Congress, but the conservatives are winning the battle of ideas. That's the conclusion we can draw from a report issued by a very liberal policymaking group called the Progressive Policy Institute.

This report adopts not only many of the specific proposals but even the approach to social issues which have been urged for years by conservatives and by those who identify themselves as the pro-family movement. This is remarkable because the division between liberals and pro-family conservatives is bitter and deep in the repeated battles in Congress and the state legislatures over sucth issues as daycare, welfare, parental consent, abortion, and divorce.

One of the principal battles between liberals and conservatives over family issues has been over the whether tax-funded government agencies should assume responsibilities (through taxes and regulations) that traditionally have belonged to the family. Implicit in that issue, of course, is how much families are to be taxed to provide such services.

The pro-family approach says, "cut our taxes and let us make our own choices." The liberal approach says, "raise taxes and impose regulations so we can make sure that families get the services and the supervision we think they ought to have."

In the last congress, the liberals fought hard for expensive daycare provided and regulated by the feds. The conservatives fought hard for a reduction of taxes on families with children, either by increasing the dependent child's personal exemption or by a tax credit for dependent children.

The Congressional compromise was to give a tax credit to families darning less than $211000 a year, but to hit those earning more than $21,000 with higher taxes in order to provide government daycare. Nobody ever explained why those earning more than $21,000 per year are less trustworthy to spend their own money and more dependent on government services and regulations than those earning less than $21,000.

Now comes this report called **Putting children First: A Progressive Family Policy for the 1990s**. It was written by four Ph.D.'s: one worked with Michael Dukakis's campaign, one with Walter Mondale's campaign, another worked on

three Democratic presidential campaigns, and a fourth is an expert in class action litigation.

The surprising conclusion of these liberals is that “public policy programs cannot fully substitute for healthy families and should not try. Instead, government should work to stabilize families and enhance their child-rearing capacity.”

The report suggests that the two-parent family is by far the most stable unit in which to raise a child, and says there is “simply no substitute for moral education that effectively conveys values” the way the family does. The report asserts that “stable families are the most effective teachers of the values needed for a healthy liberal democratic community,” and that the role for the public schools is to reinforce -- not replace -- the family.

The report concludes that the government should “look for ways to create **stable** families, not **substitute** families.” For years, conservatives have charged that liberal social programs were replacing the family, especially the father, by taxpayer handouts.

“It is no exaggeration to say that a stable, two-parent family is an American child’s best protection against poverty,” this report says, because coming from a broken home has more of an effect on a predisposition to commit crimes than either race or poverty.

The Progressive Policy Institute proposes the elements of what it calls “a progressive family policy.” Here are the main features.

1. Restore the value of the dependent child’s exemption by raising it from its present $21,000 to between $s,000 and $7,500 per child. This is exactly what conservative and pro-family types have been demanding since 1982, and it was called for by Ronald Reagan’s White House Working Group on the Family in 1986.

2. Create a non-poverty working wage by “expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit and tying it to the number of dependents in the home.” Conservatives have been urging this for years, and it was finally adopted in the child care segment of the 1990 budget bill.

3. Reform divorce laws because no-fault divorce laws have failed women and children. The easy no-fault divorce laws, which swept through nearly all

states in the 1970s, were a major legislative goal of the feminists, and that's one reason why pro-family groups have always opposed feminism.

4. Make the workplace "family friendly." Conservatives and liberals differ on some of the specific items under this heading, but conservatives have long been encouraging some of them, such as home- based employment.