The High Costs of Marriage Absence

by Phyllis Schlafly October 26, 2011

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Most Americans are unaware that about $700 Billion a year of federal taxpayers' money is handed out to non-taxpayers allegedly below a poverty line (in addition to $250 Billion a year given out by the states). After Barack Obama became President, he increased federal welfare spending by a third because, as he promised during his campaign, he wants to "spread the wealth," knowing that promotes dependence on government and votes for the Democrats.

This federal welfare apparatus consists of 69 means-tested programs: 12 programs providing food, 10 for housing assistance, 10 for social services, 9 for educational assistance, 8 programs giving cash, 8 for vocational training, 7 for medical assistance, 3 for energy and utility assistance, and 2 for child care and child development.

What is now called the hidden welfare state (because so few Americans know about its enormity) is the fastest growing component of government spending, and this does not include Social Security or Medicare payments. The total of these means-tested handouts is greater than what we are paying for our entire public school system and greater than what we are spending on national defense.

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We have just learned, for example, that 2.3 million illegal aliens, who worked U.S. jobs in 2010, paid no federal income taxes but collected $4 Billion from the U.S. Treasury in tax credit money.

The number one reason people are below the poverty line is what a group in St. Louis labels "marriage absence," and so has created a new organization called the Center for Marriage Policy to make Missouri a model to deal with this problem. At a conference this October to launch its proposals, its founder David Usher said, "Marriage absence is driving America's greatest problems, including out-of-control spending, much of the home-loan foreclosure crisis, poverty, children who fail in school, lack of health care coverage, and personal bankruptcy."

The institution of marriage as the union of one man and one woman has been fundamental to America ever since the founding of our nation. The famous French commentator Alexis de Toqueville wrote in the mid-19th century: "There is certainly no country in the world where the tie of marriage is more respected than in America."

Not only have our laws specifically recognized marriage as the union of one man and one woman, but many laws legislate special benefits. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) identified more than 1,000 federal laws that are based on the traditional definition of marriage, including the tax laws that permit married couples to file joint income tax returns and Social Security benefits awarded to fulltime homemakers (identified as dependent spouses).

The feminist movement started its attack on traditional marriage with Betty Friedan's 1963 book, which urged wives to leave their homes (called a "comfortable concentration camp"), join the workforce, and become independent of men. "Ozzie and Harriet," a traditional-couple sitcom of the 1950s, became an epithet, and it became de rigueur to speak of different kinds of "families" instead of "family."

Wikipedia now considers the traditional family a relic of the 1950s and defines it as "usually considered conservative or reactionary by its critics who argue that it is limited, outmoded and unproductive in modern Western society."

The first goal of the "women's liberation" movement was unilateral divorce, allowing one spouse (now usually the wife) to terminate a marriage without the consent of the other spouse. This drastic change in our social mores was marketed under the deceitful title "no fault."

Ronald Reagan called his signing of California's "no-fault" divorce the worst mistake he ever made, yet it was imitated by all other states. One of the first goals of the Center for Marriage Policy will be to correct Missouri's divorce law.

The anti-marriage network fanned out in state after state to repeal the laws designed to honor morality and preserve marriage, such as the laws against adultery, fornication, sodomy, alienation of affection, and even the laws that made it the duty of the husband to support his wife and children.

Government's definition of marriage is society's way of establishing the clear responsibility of the father as well as the mother for caring for those little bundles of helpless infants who appear when men and women do what comes naturally. That purpose was ignored by Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.

Beginning with LBJ's War on Poverty and its vast expansion of welfare, the system channeled all welfare money through mothers, making the husband and father irrelevant to the family's economic well-being. It should come as no surprise that this encouraged marriage absence and illegitimacy because, as Ronald Reagan said, if you subsidize something you get more of it.

The temptation to cheat is ever present. The Census Bureau just reported that one quarter of the single moms receiving generous taxpayer cash and benefits actually have a partner living in the house whom she doesn't marry because marriage would cut off her government handouts.