

THE FAILURE OF PHILANTHROPIC GREED AND THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN FAMILY POLICY

RESPONSIBLE CITIZEN SUMMARY

Background

- Strong families deliver huge economic benefits over the long run.
- Ironically, however, these benefits are in peril so long as conservative activists and donors persist in a myopic fixation on business-related public policies.

What's at stake?

- Some conservatives who care only about next-quarterly dividends may never understand why they should support family causes.
- The imbalance in philanthropic support for conservative programs stressing fiscal issues rather than those focused on strengthening and preserving robust family life.

What's next?

- It is time for conservatives who take a broader view to recognize the value of an investment in family policy.
- Conservatives must not be guilty of neglecting the permanent things by allowing the family foundation to erode.

Responsible *Citizenship*[™]

When decision makers, philanthropists, and conservative activists all focus on money first, last, and always, our shared public life (and our freedom) suffer.

“Follow the money.” Deep Throat’s famous admonition to investigative journalist Bob Woodward may have been just what he needed to hear while untangling the Watergate conspiracy. However, too many people now seem to be making it their only principle. Whether deciding on a career path, choosing a place to live, determining how to spend a leisure afternoon, or even selecting a spouse, a growing number of Americans not only seem to believe that money talks, but that no other voice deserves a hearing. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi sees all too clearly when he writes of how more and more Americans live within a cost-benefit rationality so narrowly focused on money that many are mistakenly concluding that “the opportunity costs of playing with one’s child, reading poetry, or attending a family reunion [have] become too high ... to [continue] doing such irrational things.” The terrible myopia implicit in such thinking, Csikszentmihalyi laments, leads to emotionally-impooverished lives and even to the kind of psychological imbalance requiring psychotropic drugs for treatment.

A narrow fixation on financial concerns blights more than private lives. When lawmakers, policymakers, judges, and political activists all focus on money first, last, and always, our shared public life suffers. The truly priceless virtues of patriotism, self-sacrifice and civic-mindedness disappear, as self-interested individuals and factions

wage ceaseless political war for dollars and for what dollars can buy. Of course, this warfare looks different to those who view it from the Left than it does to those who view it from the Right. Some on the left hope that their victories on the political battlefield will swell the flow of tax dollars necessary to enlarge government programs delivering various benefits – in education, housing, medical care, income supplements – to the needy. Some on the right, in contrast, hope political triumph will mean, first, that they can shield more of their personal and business dollars from the tax collector, and then that they can attain greater success in turning today's dollars into tomorrow's profits.

But even a moment's reflection will reveal that leftists often enjoy a decided advantage in these political struggles over money. For today's donations to leftist causes often translate into permanent government entitlement programs guaranteed a steady stream of dollars. In contrast, today's contribution to a conservative cause often means no more than a temporary reprieve for businesses and individuals trying to protect their income-producing enterprises. Though defeated in this round, advocates of tax-and-spend policies will be back tomorrow, pressing new measures to divert private profits into public coffers.

Given the understandable concern that conservatives share for the efficiency of a free-market economy, it may seem odd that "follow the money" may finally prove a better guide for left-leaning fundraisers than for their right-leaning counterparts. But let it be remembered that what Marx called "the cash nexus" is also the tax nexus. Leftists intent on growing the state have every reason to position themselves wherever money changes hands.

In contrast, conservatives greatly benefit whenever they reinforce an institution which removes much of life from the cash nexus: namely, the family. Leftists understand that they can capture new public monies for child-support collection, welfare support for single-parent families, and child-care facilities whenever families fail. They even dimly sense that family disintegration increases public funding for remedial education, juvenile detention, drug-treatment programs, Medicaid, and law enforcement. Even more fundamentally, leftists know that divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing help create mother-state-child families, thus pushing women to the left at the ballot box. And leveraging the misnamed "gender gap" (better named a "marriage gap") then allows leftists to claim even more tax dollars for their agenda. Leftists are thus simply "following the money" when they deploy the rhetoric of "family diversity," while attacking normative understandings of marriage and family as repressive.

Some conservatives who care only about next-quarterly dividends may never understand why they should support family causes. Perhaps this explains the imbalance in philanthropic support for conservative programs stressing fiscal issues rather than those focused on strengthening and preserving robust family life. But those conservatives who take the longer view will recognize that the family is the fountainhead of almost everything they care about. Want disciplined young people who succeed in school and bring their employers a strong work ethic? Then do everything possible to ensure that as many young people as possible grow up in an intact family. Want mothers who view the welfare state as a snare and not an essential support? Then see that child-bearing and rearing happens within wedlock. Want to reduce the state's expenditures on law enforce-

ment and social services? Then foster strong, home-centered family life.

To be sure, strong families do operate on impulses that resist financial analysis. No economist will ever put a price on the love husbands and wives feel for each other, nor on the affection parents feel for their children. This love, this affection, will inevitably translate into economically-irrational behaviors.

Yet strong families nonetheless deliver huge economic benefits over the long run. Because married couples develop effective divisions of labor and because intact families enjoy economies of scale not realized by isolated individuals or fractured families, strong families are singularly successful in accruing wealth that translates into capital for investment. Because such families inculcate habits of industry and self-sacrifice, they provide private-sector employers with their very best workers. Because such families foster thrift and self-reliance, they raise children who support principles of limited government, thereby promoting free enterprise. These long-term financial benefits of strong family life are real, and they are substantial. Ironically, however, these benefits are in peril so long as conservative activists and donors persist in a myopic fixation on short-term financial benefit.

It is time for conservatives who take a broader view to recognize the value of an investment in family policy. They must realize that the future of a free and tolerable, a just and civilized society will depend ultimately on that investment. For whatever else is gained in terms of a favorable business climate will be ultimately lost if not sustained by a substratum of strong, vibrant families who instill in their children the virtues necessary to liberty. The Left may continue to take Deep Throat as the best and only guide to political strategy. Conservatives

must not be similarly guilty of neglecting the permanent things by allowing the family foundation to erode.

Bryce J. Christensen, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the department of English at Southern Utah University and adjunct fellow of Sutherland Institute's Center for Family and Society. He is a contributing editor to *The Family in America* and author of *Divided We Fall: Family Discord and the Fracturing of America* (Transaction, 2005). Dr. Christensen has also published articles on family issues in *Society*, *The Public Interest*, *Policy Review*, *Modern Age*, and other journals.

William C. Duncan, J.D., is director of the Marriage Law Foundation and is the director of Sutherland Institute's Center for Family and Society. He formerly served as acting director of the Marriage Law Project at the Catholic University of America's Columbus School of Law and as executive director of the Marriage and Family Law Research Grant at J. Reuben Clark Law School, Brigham Young University, where he was also a visiting professor.



Crane Building

307 West 200 South, Suite 5005

Salt Lake City, UT 84101

www.sutherlandinstitute.org

office: 801.355.1272

fax: 801.355.1705