

Strong Marriage, Strong Economy

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It's no question that the nation's financial struggles are taking a toll on the family. Experts blame the poor economy for falling birth rates, which have hit new lows according to a recent report. But studies are also pointing to the reverse corollary — that the breakdown of the family is contributing to the nation's economic slide.

“At the collective level, the retreat from marriage has played a noteworthy role in fueling the growth in family income inequality and child poverty that has beset the nation since the 1970s,” the Brookings Institute reported in August.

Similarly, other organizations are calling for a frank assessment of the family's status and how it affects the nation's bottom line.

“There must be a realization that our nation's economic decline will not be reversed until we address the elephant in the room — the breakdown of the family,” said Family Research Council Action President Tony Perkins in a recent press release. “The best economic program is the two-parent family with children. These families will raise children who will drive our nation's future productivity which must steadily increase if we are to reverse economic decline.”

His organization recently released a study showing that only 45 percent of American children reach their 17th year with both their biological parents married. Broken families lead to lower educational performance, higher poverty, higher out-of-wedlock birth, more crime and other social ills.

“The parental relationship, when it's in marriage, becomes the foundational social relationship in all of society,” the FRC's Pat Fagan told One News Now. “From that, all the rest breaks; without that, everything else is weakened — everything.”

A Huffington Post article published this fall called marriage “quite literally, ... the lifeblood of the economy,” citing a report from the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia and its findings that seven sectors of the economy experience tenable growth when people get married and have children and consequently suffer when marriage and fertility rates flounder. The Brookings Institute says its research shows that “women and men who get and stay married are more likely to accrue substantial financial assets and to enjoy good physical and mental health. In fact, married men enjoy a wage premium compared to their single peers that may exceed 10 percent.”

Perkins said the economic benefits of a strong marriage carry on to the next generation.

“A skilled and educated workforce flows most efficiently from the two-parent, stable family that worships together regularly,” he said. “This is why any economic program must include policies that encourage, and not hinder, family formation and marriage.”

The Heritage Foundation similarly called for policy makers to encourage marriage and promote stable family formation.

“By maximizing the benefits of family life for the next generation of Americans, it could reduce the costs of family breakdown to taxpayers while fostering personal happiness, independence and productivity,” Heritage Senior Research Fellow Chuck Donovan wrote.

“There is hope yet if we begin to realize the importance of marriage not just to a man and wife, which is tremendous; not just to their children, which is undeniable; but to our entire social structure, which is absolutely essential,” said the Rev. Mark Creech, executive director of the Christian Action League. “We’ve let cohabitation, no-fault divorce, and many other myths lead us astray from God’s plan for marriage and our whole nation is paying the tab.”

He urged Christians across the state to first renew their own commitment to marriage and then push for policies and laws that support it, such as the Marriage Protection Amendment scheduled to appear on North Carolina’s May 2012 ballot.

States that have protected marriage with constitutional amendments that affirm its definition as between one man and one woman have better business rankings than those that have not or those that have redefined marriage to include homosexual couples, according to the N.C. Values Coalition. In fact, this year, all of the top 10 economically healthy states identified in a report by the American Legislative Exchange Council have marriage protection laws, while the bottom 10 all undermine marriage in their laws.

Contrary to claims of promoters of same-sex marriage, elevating the Tar Heel state’s current marriage laws to a Constitutional amendment will not interfere with any private company offering benefits to gay and lesbian employees.

“What most companies want is stability — to know that the laws and the business climate of the area where they are locating are not going to undergo dramatic change,” said Dr. Creech. “Protecting marriage from redefinition also gives them confidence that they won’t be forced to offer government-imposed partner benefits.”

Plus, he said, it’s clear that strong, stable marriages are the best place to raise future members of the workforce.

“Children raised in intact, married families are more likely to acquire the human and social capital they need to become well-adjusted, productive workers,” according to The Sustainable Demographic Dividend, a report released by The Social Trends Institute in October.

“This report suggests that demographic trends in marriage and fertility play an underappreciated and important role in fostering long-term economic growth, the viability of the welfare state, the size and quality of the workforce, and the health of large sectors of the modern economy,” said Bradford Wilcox, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Virginia and director of the National Marriage Project.

“We need to support traditional marriage for a myriad of reasons unrelated to the bottom line,” said Dr. Creech. “But the fact that it makes sense economically just adds icing to the cake.”

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