

Strengthening the Role of Fathers in Families

August 24, 1999

The Clinton/Gore Administration continues to place a high priority on supporting strong and healthy working families and on strengthening the role of fathers. We support the general goal of encouraging states and communities to help fathers become more involved in their children's lives. This track record includes:

- The 1996 welfare reform law and the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 gives states the opportunity to promote responsible fatherhood by providing employment and training to noncustodial parents of children on welfare, and increasing child support collections.
- As part of welfare reform, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will soon award bonuses to up to five states with the largest decreases in the percentage of births that are out-of-wedlock so long as those states have also decreased their abortion rates.
- In addition, the flexibility under welfare reform allows state to provide services to 2-parent low-income families. For example, some states are disregarding higher levels of earnings, allowing more 2-parent families to stay together and receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funded benefits.
- In June 1995, the President directed all federal agencies to review every program, policy and initiative pertaining to families to ensure program objectives seek to engage fathers, and modify programs primarily serving mothers and children to include fathers where appropriate. Last spring, the HHS Office of Child Support Enforcement released guidance clarifying federal policy allowing states to disregard arrearages when parents marry or re-marry.
- Family friendly policies have been implemented through enactment of the Family Medical Leave Act, expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, and the new Child Tax Credit.
- Agencies have launched initiatives and demonstration projects to promote responsible fatherhood and father involvement in programs such as child health immunization and early education.

Next Steps

The President's FY 2000 Budget proposes to invest \$1 billion to extend the Welfare-to-Work program to help more long-term welfare recipients and noncustodial parents in high-poverty areas move into lasting unsubsidized employment. The initiative would provide at least \$150 million to ensure that every state helps fathers play a responsible part in their children's lives. Under this proposal, states and communities would use a minimum of 20 percent of their formula funds to provide job placement and job retention assistance to low-income fathers who sign personal responsibility contracts committing them to work, establish paternity, and pay child support. This effort would further increase child support collections, which have risen 80 percent since the President took office, from \$8 billion in 1992 to \$14.4 billion in 1998. Remaining funds will go toward assisting long-term welfare recipients with the greatest barriers to employment to move into lasting jobs. The reauthorized program also would double the Welfare-to-Work funding available for tribes. The Administration's reauthorization proposal is

included in H.R. 1482 introduced by Congressman Cardin and S. 1317 introduced by Senator Akaka.

MEMORANDUM TO THE VICE PRESIDENT

From: Nancy Hoit
Andrea Kane, DPC
Lisa Mallory, NPR

Date: July 2, 1999

Re: **Accomplishments on Strengthening the Role of Fathers**

After meeting with leaders in the emerging field of fatherhood in 1993, you focused the 1994 Family Reunion Conference on the role of men in children's lives. The following partnerships and initiatives were a direct result of Family Re-Union III:

- **National Practitioner's Network for Fathers and Families** formed to encourage father involvement in fragile families and to support communication among father-focused programs.
- **Father to Father** network started to support ways men reach out to one another with the intention of becoming better fathers.
- **Funder's Collaborative** formed among Annie E. Casey, Danforth, Ford and C.S. Mott foundations which has yielded almost \$20 million in new funding for father-focused programs and research.
- **FatherNet**, an on-line resource, started at the University of Minnesota.
- In 1994, after an announcement of "Father to Father" in the Indian Treaty Room, we met with fatherhood leaders to learn how the administration could best support their efforts. We immediately drafted a memorandum signed shortly thereafter by the President. This **Presidential Memorandum** mandated **collaboration between NPR and DPC** on this issue (a collaboration continuing today). All federal agencies were required to revise programs, policies, research, and personnel practices to proactively strengthen fatherhood wherever appropriate.
- You addressed the conference of the **National Fatherhood Initiative** in Dallas in October of 1994.

- 96
- You chaired a **May 1995 conference of 800 federal workers** to review progress in implementation of the Memorandum, suggest additional strategies, and learn from best practices.
 - **The National Center on Fathers and Families** issued a report on the conference and the federal initiative and hosted a Round Table Series on research, policy and practice.
 - The following day you gave a **major address on fatherhood** to the biennial meeting of the Family Resource Coalition in Chicago.
 - With your leadership, NPR and DPC convened an ongoing **Interagency Fatherhood Working Group** to follow-up on the Memorandum which has raised the visibility of fatherhood within the agencies, as well as promoted cross-agency collaboration on fatherhood issues. Some of the specific results include:
 - **redesigned research** which actively seeks data on fathers;
 - **redesigned requests for proposals** that encourage father participation ;
 - **changed federal personnel policies** that encourage fathers' active participation in their children's lives;
 - Department of Defense strategies to involve absent fathers **and encourage father involvement in local schools**;
 - Justice is working with other federal agencies, national foundations, and Weed and Seed communities **on initiatives for incarcerated fathers** and to support the **healthy reintegration of ex-offender fathers** with their families and communities;
 - **increased Head Start efforts to involve fathers** in young children's education and in Early Head Start research;
 - **changes in federal housing regulations and outreach efforts** to housing authorities to promote responsible fatherhood
 - In October 1997, **you and Secretary Riley called on fathers to be more involved in their children's education and released a Department of Education report** emphasizing that children whose fathers are actively involved in their education are more likely to perform better academically.
 - The Department of Education has made fathers a key part of their **efforts to increase family involvement in education** – an effort that continues to grow. In late June, Secretary Riley participated in Governor Carper's summit on Fatherhood where Delaware signed up as a partner for family involvement.
 - In June 1998, the **Federal Interagency Forum for Child and Family Statistics issued its first report focusing on fathers**, confirming earlier findings that children growing up without a father are more likely to do poorly in school, do drugs, and have a hard time finding and keeping a job. On the positive side, a father's involvement, even in a broken

family, has a very positive impact on the children. This report also marked out, for the first time, a ten point plan for expanding approaches to family research to gather more information on the special role of fathers. **You released this report at the National Fatherhood Initiative Summit last June**, and presented the interagency research group with a Hammer Award.

- The Administration has **made fathers a key part of welfare reform and welfare to work**. The Welfare-to-Work program the Administration fought to include in the 1997 Balanced Budget Act provide \$3 billion over two years to States and communities to assist the hardest-to-employ welfare recipients and non-custodial parents of children on welfare move into unsubsidized jobs and economic self-sufficiency. With Secretary Herman's leadership, the Department of Labor has encouraged states and communities to establish partnerships between welfare and child support agencies, workforce agencies, and community-based organizations to help increase employment of non-custodial fathers. The Department is currently investing about \$100 million in **Welfare-to-Work grants to some states and communities around the country that focus on fathers**. You announced some of these grants at a town hall meeting at the Department of Labor last November.
- **The President's budget proposes to invest an additional \$1 billion in the Welfare-to-Work initiative with an expanded focus on fathers**. To help more low income fathers fulfill their responsibilities to their children, this proposal requires every state to spend at least 20 percent of its Welfare-to-Work funds on non-custodial fathers who sign a Personal Responsibility Contract agreeing to work, establish paternity, and pay child support. The Administration's reauthorization proposal is reflected in H.R. 1482, "The Welfare to Work Amendments of 1999" introduced by Congressman Cardin. A Senate companion bill was just introduced by Senator Akaka, with Senator Moynihan as a co-sponsor.
- You highlighted the **importance of the male role in preventing teen pregnancy** at the recent round table you held when **you released new data showing encouraging declines in the teen birth rate**. One of the participants was Enrique Arreola who directs the male involvement pregnancy prevention program at the Mexican American Community Services Agency in Santa Clara, California.
- At the recent Family Re-Union Conference, you **highlighted new data from HHS showing that the number of fathers taking responsibility for their children by establishing paternity has tripled since 1992**. Acknowledging paternity is a crucial first step to increasing fathers' involvement in their children's lives and is essential to ensuring children receive the financial and emotional support they need. The dramatic increase is due in large part to the success of an Administration proposal enacted in the

- 4 -

1993 budget which requires hospitals to provide new parents with the opportunity to establish paternity on site by signing a simple form.

Asking More From Matrimony

By Douglas J. Besharov

WASHINGTON
In 1986, a much-discussed study contended that a woman over 40 had a less than 1 percent chance of getting married — or, in the words of *Newsweek*, she was more likely to be “killed by a terrorist.”

It was a vivid phrase but an inaccurate one, it turned out. Other researchers quickly corrected the study. Women were getting married, they were just getting married later.

Now comes a new study from the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University claiming that the marriage rate has declined by roughly 43 percent since 1960. According to this report, the marriage rate of single women 15 years old and older declined to 49.7 per thousand in 1996, from 87.5 per thousand in 1960.

Once again, the demise of marriage is being exaggerated. How? Age 15 is the wrong cut-off for comparing marriage rates in 1960 and 1996, because people now just don't wed at such an early age. Since 1960, the median age of women getting married for the first time has increased by four and a half years, to 24.8 from 20.3.

To measure marriage rates accurately, most demographers today calculate the percentage of women who are “ever married.” Assuming that

Douglas J. Besharov is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and a professor at the School of Public Affairs at the University of Maryland. Andrew R. West assisted with this article.

one should not count teen-agers because so few marry, in 1960 the proportion of women 20 and older who had ever been married was 90 percent. Thirty-six years later the proportion of women who were then or had at one time been married stood at 83 percent — only about 8 percent lower.

That's the statistic for women who get married. What about staying married? Here, the situation has worsened. Divorce rates rose sharply through the 60's and 70's. Although divorce is down slightly since its 1980 peak, about 1 marriage in 3 still fails.

A new report has it wrong; marriage isn't dead just yet.

Moreover, remarriage after divorce or a spouse's death is way down, partly because the stigma attached to cohabitation has been substantially reduced and partly because more women can survive financially on their own.

To measure these combined trends, demographers calculate the percentage of women “currently married.” Here, by my calculations, we can see a big change. If one accounts for later marriages and longer life spans by counting only those Americans between the ages of 20 and 74 (after age 74, too many husbands are dying to get a fair count of marriage), only 64

percent of women were currently married as of 1996, versus 76 percent in 1960.

Yes, marriage bonds are weaker than ever. And people now divorce for what, to many, seem like insubstantial reasons. Out-of-wedlock birth rates remain high, and cohabitation rates continue to climb. But this does not mean that young people have rejected marriage. If anything, they want more from marriage than ever before.

These days, young people tend to marry later, after they have completed their education and have a better idea of who they are. Because they have seen so much divorce, many want to be very sure before making such a big decision. Studies show they want marriage to be a partnership, with equality between men and women, and to be emotionally satisfying in ways never dreamed of by their parents, let alone grandparents. And they think that a bad marriage is worse than no marriage — so they are more willing to divorce even if they have young children. Young women are also less willing to wed just because they are pregnant.

One does not have to sympathize with all these lofty aspirations (or ignore their inconsistencies) to recognize that young people aren't giving up on marriage; they are just modernizing it.

So, instead of exaggerating the death of marriage, and instead of making obsolete assumptions about when young people should marry, we should try to understand this seismic change in their behavior and attitudes. □

The New York Times

WEDNESDAY, JULY 14, 1999