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The Enormous Fiscal Dividend to Family Planning

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Can anything be done on a bipartisan basis these days? The answer is yes if we turn out the temperature and start listening to one another. In this regard, I want to tell you about a recent unpublished study by an independent, careful researcher and friend, Michael Gottlieb, on the fiscal dividend to family planning.

Here are Gottlieb's findings.

The composition of families has changed radically over the years. In 1970 single women with children comprised 11% of the population. In 2010 they comprised 41% of the population. The majority of these single parent families are living in poverty. Worse still, 43% of the children in these families will remain impoverished into adulthood.

The societal costs are staggering. They include health care, welfare, food stamps, education and other subsidies, women not being able to enter the workplace, higher crime rates, and higher costs of incarceration.

Liberals and conservatives have their favorite ways of dealing with these problems.

Liberals argue that we should simply accept the new reality and support single parents by providing more child care, health care, and food and cash assistance. These efforts help, but with one-third of all children now living in single parent families, and child poverty rates in these families four times as high as they are in two-parent families, this is a hugely expensive proposition. It is also inconsistent with a widespread public ethic that values self-sufficiency over dependency.

Conservatives believe that the problem is cultural and that restoration of marriage is not only possible, but represents that best route to reducing poverty and inequality. But, there is no magic wand that is going to restore the Ozzie and Harriet family composition for many in our society.

Neither liberals nor conservatives are grappling successfully with the challenge of minimizing the formation of single parent families and solving the problems of other safety-net families, thus reducing poverty and its huge costs

Effective family planning would meet both these challenges, and more. In 2010, according to the Guttmacher Institute (as reported by Gottlieb), the government spent \$2.4 billion on family planning services that resulted in savings to the taxpayer of \$13.6 billion dollars in Medicaid costs, and another \$1.6 billion dollars in future costs for cancer care, miscarriages and sexually transmitted diseases.

This means a savings of almost 7 times the investment in family planning in just the first year, not to mention substantial reductions in abortions and miscarriages.

But, Gottlieb goes much further than Guttmacher and takes into account the fact that there are also savings in welfare, food stamps, Medicaid and educations from avoidance of unplanned pregnancies, and that these savings go on for years. If one continues past the first year scenario for 11 years, the savings would be as much as \$213 billion. And, if we kept investing these funds in family planning year after year, the savings would be in the trillions of dollars.

Colorado recently funded free contraceptives for all the safety-net health centers in the state. Women who voluntarily wished to plan their families were able to freely choose the method and get educated in its use. The result, reported by Gottlieb, was a 40% reduction in teen birth rates, and a 35% reduction in abortions and a 25% reduction in high-risk pregnancies. The vast majority of American women approve of birth control.

Conservatives should love family planning because it greatly reduces government outlays, reduces abortions, and gives more single women a chance to enter the work force, all at a modest cost that is more than made up in the first years. Liberals should love the huge potential reduction in poverty, and the greater flexibility women would have to manage their lives.

A greater investment in family planning may be the single most effective way toward a bipartisan solution to many of our domestic problems. Effective family planning requires not only investment, but also education, so that every teenager and young adult, both male and female, understands the benefit and availability of family planning to their future.