Family Breakdown Essay, Research Paper

Many problems affect our society, and each problem presents us with different challenges and obstacles. The most prevalent of these problems are crime, poverty, and poor education. Collectively, society looks toward the government to intervene and find a solution to these problems. This is easily illustrated by reflecting back to our last presidential election. The two candidates, George Bush and Al Gore, gave their views and outlined the agendas they hoped to implement in order to resolve society?s problems. Mr. Gore proposed that we give more economic relief to individuals to increase their economic status, thereby reducing the need for crime and providing more opportunity for enhanced education. This belief asserts a social agenda in which the government plays a paternal role to aid society. George Bush?s ideas revolve around the underlying premise that people should have more responsibility for the actions they take and a greater ability to make decisions individually, in order to lessen the burden on society. His beliefs assert an individualistic approach that relies on a person to make their own decisions to resolve societal problems. One can argue for or against each philosophy and give sound reasons for each view. This issue raises a great debate among the people of this nation, which is proven by the fact that the last presidential election was the closest in history.

It is easy to identify problems, yet, it is much more difficult to identify the causes. Politicians want to make decisions proactively, instead of simply reacting to problems as they arise. One of the largest and most prevalent causes of crime, poverty, and poor education stems from the breakdown of the family. Leslie Carbone writes in her article, The Government?s Role In Family Breakdown,

?Fatherless children are twice as likely to drop out of school and five times as likely to live in poverty. The likelihood that a young male will engage in criminal activity doubles if he is raised without a father and triples if he lives in a neighborhood with a high concentration of single-parent families?

No one will argue that families are important to society, but how can one stop the cyclical effect of dysfunctional families. Since this is a societal problem, one must address how society can deal with the problem through government policy.

Divorce is on the rise. Society used to define marriage as a union, before God, between a man and a woman. Government licensed this religious union to make it a binding legal contract. Marriage was seen as a lifetime commitment ?for better or for worse? and there were few things that were strong enough to break that bond. Today however, couples are finding is easier to get divorced. Government has played a role in this by permitting no-fault divorce, which allows unilateral divorce for no reason at all. In effect, the contractual obligation of the marital union has been taken away. Our society has suffered from this. People today are more interested in themselves and their own feelings, leaving them blind to the effect their actions have on others, even their own children. As children grow up and see more divorces, or even experience a divorce in their family, they learn by example that giving up on a marriage is plausible, acceptable, and even rewarding in some cases. A cyclical pattern emerges as youths learn to be self-fulfilling rather than family sustaining. This pattern of behavior must be stopped. The no-fault divorce has nullified the legal contract of marriage and reduces it to nothing but a ceremonial piece of paper, easily annulled or destroyed. Government must enforce the legal contract of marriage by making divorce more difficult.

Another way government has failed society is by paying single mothers to have children, otherwise known as the welfare program. As previously mentioned, poverty is a societal ill. To remedy this problem, the government has established these welfare programs that financially help out impoverished people, in the hopes that some extra money will motivate them to be self-sufficient. Self-Sufficiency has not been accomplished. During President Johnson?s administration, our government enacted a policy approach called the ?Great Society?. No one can argue the good intentions of the men and women who established these social programs, however, the effects have devastated families. Single mothers are given more money for each additional child they bring into the world. ?By paying women to have children outside of wedlock, welfare has created a caste of people who don?t even know anyone who?s married.? (Leslie Carbone) The children of these programs learn this pattern of irresponsibility and they will carry it over to our next generation. No other issue in our society causes such a heated debate at this. What do we do with poverty and how do we solve it. Politicians find it easy to throw money at these individuals and make them dependent on the government. One observation that appears to be cold-hearted and without emotions is this, you will find no beggars if no one gives to them. By giving money to single parents, our society is endorsing this behavior and promoting its continued existence in our society. We must stop giving money freely to women who continue to have children out of wedlock. Our children must learn better. This is by no way alleviating the ?fathers? of their responsibility in this. By not giving money freely, we will teach our children, both male and female, that this activity is not endorsed, and will not be rewarded.

It is hard to argue with the assertion that the family breakup is bad for our society, but there is much debate about how to resolve this. Any proffered solution must provide evidence of a reduction in individuals? beliefs that marriage and family are easily disregarded and dismissed. This will teach our children that procreation should only be carried out within the bonds of marriage and marriage is a sacred union that must not be entered into lightly. But how do we accomplish these goals in our current social climate? It is difficult for our society to enact such a broad social task as this, due to the fact that we live in an individualistic society. A society that embraces some social tendencies, but for the most part lives as a group of individuals who hold themselves accountable to no one. To accomplish this social goal in this type of society, we must stop our government from endorsing a social practice we feel is intolerable.

Our government must repeal the no-fault divorce policy. We must respect the contractual obligation of marriage, and it must be enforceable. Without this, how can our society respect this contract? We must also implement broad welfare reform policies. We cannot continue to reward behavior that is detrimental to society. These are not easy issues to remedy, and anyone who attempts to give logical ways to implement a solution must face fierce criticism from many different factions of society. Our society must be resolved to fight this issue until a solution is found. Government must eliminate the policies that caused this damage in the first place.

By eliminating the continued cycle of family breakups, our society will begin to find a resolution to these problems associated with crime, poverty and poor education. These problems are directly linked to the break down of the American family, so we must direct our efforts to this initial problem. Our society cannot afford to be content with a leader who will not address these issues, and we must not chastise those who offer solutions. People are labeled mean spirited and evil for their beliefs in welfare reform, with this judgment, a solution will never be reached. We also need to stop criticizing people for their belief in the sanctity of marriage. Too often these people are labeled moral fanatics, or religious goofs. Instead of criticizing people for their ideas on how to resolve these issues, we must gather behind our common interests to stop divorce, thus restoring faith in the traditional American family and trusted family values.