



## **Incentivizing Sex: Where Social and Fiscal Conservatives Must Learn to Agree**

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As I was eating at a restaurant on Saturday, a young woman wearing a Rosary caught my eye. Raised Catholic, she told me that she doesn't believe in abstinence until marriage, she doesn't need to marry the father of her child and that women's bodies must be liberated from the control of the Church's male hierarchy.

She also argued that more welfare would be needed if people had more kids, and that drug overdoses were the greatest population control methods in America.

### **Drug Overdoses Versus Abortion**

Are drug overdoses the greatest population control method in the nation? The answer is definitely "no."

According to the Centers for Disease Control, over 52,000 people died of drug overdoses in 2015. The pro-abortion research organization Guttmacher Institute calculated that about 1.1 million unborn children were aborted in 2011, the latest figures they have. (This *doesn't* include all the unborn children aborted using abortion-inducing drugs and devices.)

Using Guttmacher's numbers, about 21 times as many pregnancies were ended by abortion than the number of people who died due to drug overdoses. Whether one believes an unborn child is human, stopping over one million pregnancies from coming to completion is the definition of population control. Additionally, tens of millions of women use contraception to stop themselves from getting pregnant.

The woman agreed with both of these points, once they were spelled out. But a simple mathematical "smell test" would have sniffed out this falsehood.

### **Welfare and Kids**

She was partly right about welfare. America *would* spend more than its current hundreds of billions of dollars on welfare if people had more kids irresponsibly. What she didn't realize is that welfare as it's now administered makes irresponsible parenting more common.

And *that* what raises the costs. Consider an analogy.

As former Obama administration economic adviser and former Harvard University president Lawrence Summers says, government programs like welfare provide people with “an incentive, and the means, not to work.”

Summers explained that “each unemployed person has a ‘reservation wage’ — the minimum wage he or she insists on getting before accepting a job. Unemployment insurance and other social assistance programs increase that reservation wage, causing an unemployed person to remain unemployed longer.”

According to a 2013 Cato Institute report, 13 states provided welfare that equaled a wage of more than \$15 per hour. The federal minimum wage is \$7.25. The highest minimum wage in the country is \$15, in cities like Seattle. Why would anyone get off welfare to work, unless they could make more than what they're getting from the government dole?

The same logic applies to family size and welfare. With so much “free” money for single mothers, men and women alike are encouraged to engage in irresponsible sexual practices that often leave women pregnant, ready to rely on the government. In other words, families are incentivized to replace a father in the home with a government check.

It's simple math and incentives. For another example, the federal government provided \$60 million for the Title X program in 2014. The program provides “family planning services.” The government is telling tens of millions of women that they can have sex without getting pregnant. It's telling all their partners that they can have sex without worrying about becoming a father.

Your tax dollars are encouraging promiscuity.

But what's the reality? Greater access to contraception reduces neither unintended pregnancies nor abortions. Contraceptives sometimes fail, for one thing. They also make people overconfident, which leads to riskier sexual behavior with more partners — and therefore, many more unintended pregnancies. And, therefore, more demand for welfare.

### **Think About Incentives**

It's long past time for all Americans to think about incentives when considering public policy. Liberals understand this when it's convenient — they raise soda taxes to reduce obesity. The idea is that the more something costs, the less of it that people buy. But by that same economic theory, doesn't a welfare payment that's higher than the wages people will get paid reduce their reason to work?

A Heritage Foundation analysis found that over \$400 billion in “means-tested welfare” went to “low-income families with children” in 2014.

Conservatives have no excuse not to understand the basic truths about incentives. Fiscal conservatives regularly complain about high welfare costs, and social conservatives frequently

point to Planned Parenthood's taxpayer-funded promotion and provision of contraceptives and abortion.

Yet both groups often fight different battles that are intertwined *because of incentives*, and thus their effectiveness is limited. One worries about the family, and the other worries about the budget ... but as shown above, they are intertwined.

Social conservatives should work with fiscal conservatives to reduce budgets that incentivize poor sexual behavior that breaks down families and leads to more abortions. Fiscal conservatives should work with social conservatives to encourage strong families, because strong families use fewer government resources and are more economically powerful.

That's one way to make America great again.