WSJ

Dobbs and the Economy

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With states and voters now free to decide abortion policies, it's understandable that pro-choice politicians would be rolling out arguments for the broadest possible availability of the procedure. But what's harder to understand is the recent phenomenon of Biden administration officials arguing not just that abortion access is a right but also that it's a benefit to the U.S. economy.

Political advisers may already be wisely urging the White House not to address such a consequential personal decision with appeals to macroeconomics. But if Team Biden is determined to make it a math argument, there has hardly been a worse moment to make such a case.

The basic administration argument is that labor-force participation will be higher if people have more ability to end unwanted pregnancies. Given all of the pandemic-related Biden policies that have discouraged labor-force participation, one may question the depth of White House concern on this issue. But the administration's argument is plausible for the immediate future. It's also very shortsighted.

If one were to list the greatest economic challenges facing the United States, surely among the top items would be a massively indebted federal government with more than $30 trillion of acknowledged debt— and many trillions more in unfunded retirement entitlement promises— supported by a country that has been creating fewer future workers.

Last year showed only modest improvement in a dismal U.S. trend. The Journal's Janet Adamy and Anthony DeBarros reported in May:
Births still remain at historically low levels after peaking in 2007 and then plummeting during the recession that began the end of that year. The total fertility rate—a snapshot of the average number of babies a woman would have over her lifetime—was 1.66 last year, up from 1.64 the prior year, when it fell to the lowest level since the government began tracking it in the 1930s.

“This minor blip up still leaves us on a long-term trajectory towards lower births,” said Phillip Levine, an economics professor at Wellesley College.
For nearly 15 years the annual U.S. total fertility rate has been below the 2.1 average considered necessary for generations to replace themselves. Without improvement or more sensible policy for expanded lawful immigration, the U.S. economy won’t just struggle. It may eventually cease to exist.

The late great economist Julian Simon called human beings the ultimate natural resource. Around the world, the positive correlation between population growth and rising prosperity may not get the media attention it deserves, but the global historical trend is well established. In 2018 Marian Tupy wrote for the Cato Institute:

Many people believe that global population growth leads to greater poverty and more famines, but evidence suggests otherwise. Between 1960 and 2016, the world’s population increased by 145 percent. Over the same time period, real average annual per capita income in the world rose by 183 percent.
Instead of a rise in poverty rates, the world saw the greatest poverty reduction in human history.

The Shutdown Disaster Was World-Wide
The Economist still clings to the talking point that school shutdowns were initially “a prudent precaution” to address Covid, but give the magazine credit for acknowledging the catastrophic response to Covid:
During the first two years of the pandemic more than 80% of schooldays in Latin America and South Asia were disrupted by closures of some sort. Even today schools in some countries, such as the Philippines, remain shut to most pupils, leaving their minds to atrophy.

Globally, the harm that school closures have done to children has vastly outweighed any benefits they may have had for public health... The World Bank says the share of ten-year-olds in middle- and low-income countries who cannot read and understand a simple story has risen from 57% in 2019 to roughly 70%. If they lack such elementary skills, they will struggle to earn a good living. The bank estimates that $21trn will be wiped off their lifetime earnings--equivalent to about 20% of the world’s annual GDP today.
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Mississippi’s Life Saver
Natalie Neysa Alund reports in USA Today:
A teenager is being hailed a hero after city officials in Mississippi said he saved three people and a police officer over the holiday weekend after a vehicle plunged into water.
Corion Evans, 16, came to the aid of three female victims after he saw a car drive off the Interstate 10 boat launch into the Pascagoula River, the Moss Point Police Department reported in a news release.

Undeterred by the dark water, Evans headed straight into the river. Later, he learned, alligators live in the river and its bayous.
“I was scared, but I just focused on keeping everybody calm,” he said...

Moss Point police officer Gary Mercer was dispatched to the scene and said Evans was already in the water when he arrived. Mercer said he jumped into the river and began assisting one of the teenagers who said she couldn't swim. After Mercer tried to carry the girl on his back, she panicked and caused him to go underwater.

"He was trying to come back up but kept swallowing water," Evans said. "He was trying to catch his breath but he tells her, 'I can't, I can't.' That's when I swam over to them."

Evans then helped Mercer and the woman reach the shore. He attributes his physical strength to playing high school football and his swimming experience. He said he learned how to swim as a 3-year-old in his grandmother's pool...

The young women gave Evans a gift basket complete with bags of "Life Savers" candy.

Evans, who will be a senior at Pascagoula High School in the fall, wants to study physical therapy or sports medicine in college. A GoFundMe page was started to help pay his tuition, which he is calling a "blessing."

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One Way to Respond to High Gas Prices

Always at the forefront of progressive policy innovation, local officials in California are leading a movement to force drivers out of gasoline-powered cars.

Grace Toohey reports in the Los Angeles Times:

Without realizing they were starting a movement in green energy policy, leaders of a small Sonoma Valley city seem to have done just that when they questioned the approval process for a new gas station — eventually halting its development and others in the future.

"We didn't know what we were doing, actually," said Petaluma Councilwoman D'Lynda Fischer, who led the charge last year to prohibit new gas stations in the city of 60,000. "We didn't know we were the first in the world when we banned gas stations."

Indeed, the idea that they did not know what they were doing is widely shared. But has that ever stopped a costly climate policy from achieving popularity among Golden State politicos? Ms. Toohey notes that the regulatory assault on the most popular form of automotive transportation is picking up speed:

Since Petaluma's decision, four other cities in the Bay Area have followed suit, and now, leaders in California's most car-centric metropolis are hoping to bring the climate-conscious policy to Southern California.

It opens a new front in California's efforts to reduce carbon emissions and already is generating opposition from the fuel industry, which argues consumers would suffer.

They surely will, and many of them may just drive right out of state and never return. If they go all the way to Mississippi, drivers may find lower prices and some of the world's most helpful neighbors.