



Obama's Using Our Tax Dollars to Leverage More Food Stamp Dependency

By: Daniel J. Mitchell

In past posts, I've grouched about food stamp abuse, including people using them to [buy luxury coffee at Starbucks](#) and to [purchase steaks and lobster](#). I've complained about [college kids scamming the program](#), the ["Octo-Mom" mooching off the program](#), and the [Obama Administration rewarding states](#) that sign up more food stamp recipients.

Well, the Obama White House is doubling down on creating more dependency, spending tax dollars to increase the number of people on food stamps.

Here are some of disturbing [details from a CNN report](#).

More than one in seven Americans are on food stamps, but the federal government wants even more people to sign up for the safety net program. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has been running radio ads for the past four months encouraging those eligible to enroll. ... The department is spending between \$2.5 million and \$3 million on paid spots, and free public service announcements are also airing. The campaign can be heard in California, Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Ohio, and the New York metro area. ... President Bush launched a recruitment campaign, which pushed average participation up by 63% during his eight years in office. The USDA began airing paid radio spots in 2004. President Obama's stimulus act made it easier for childless, jobless adults to qualify for the program and increased the monthly benefit by about 15% through 2013.

Last year, I semi-defended Newt Gingrich when he was attacked for calling Obama the "Food Stamp" President.

Citing this chart, I wrote that, “It certainly looks like America is becoming a food stamp nation.”

But my bigger point is that welfare is bad for both taxpayers and the people who get trapped into relying on big government.

The ideal approach, as [explained in this video](#), is to get the federal government out of the business of redistributing income. We are far more likely to get better results if we let states experiment with different approaches.

House Republicans, to their credit, already want to [do this with Medicaid](#). So why not block grant all social welfare programs?

The icing on the cake is that no longer would the federal government be [running ads to lure people into dependency](#).

[President Bush’s Pro-Marriage Spending Programs: Another Failure of Big Government](#)

Statism is a bad idea, regardless of which political party is promoting bigger government. And it’s a really bad idea when people who should know better decide to increase the [burden of government spending](#).

Consider, for example, the supposedly pro-marriage programs adopted last decade by Republicans. It turns out that millions of dollars were wasted and there was no positive impact on relationships.

Here are some excerpts from a [story in Mother Jones](#).

With congressional Republicans beating the drum about profligate and wasteful government spending, they may want to take a hard look at a federal program pushed by a host of top GOPers during the Bush-era... Originally championed by Republican lawmakers including Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley, former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, and current Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback, a federal initiative to promote marriage as a cure for poverty dumped hundreds of millions of dollars into programs that either had no impact or a negative effect on the relationships of the couples who took part,

according to recent research by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). ... Starting in 2006, millions of dollars were hastily distributed to grantees... The money went to such enterprises as "Laugh Your Way America," a program run by a non-Spanish speaking Wisconsin minister who used federal dollars to offer "Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage" seminars to Latinos. It funded Rabbi Stephen Baars, a British rabbi who'd been giving his trademarked "Bliss" marriage seminars to upper-middle-class Jews in Montgomery County, Maryland, for years. ... when the federal government started dumping million of poverty dollars into marriage education, there was virtually no research on how such programs would fare with poor, inner-city single moms. Now, though, the data is in, and it doesn't look good for proponents of taxpayer funded marriage education. This month, HHS released the results of several years of research about the performance of the marriage programs, and it indicates that the Bush-era effort to encourage Americans (straight ones, at least) to walk down the aisle has been a serious flop. ... Take the Building Healthy Families program..., couples in the eight pilot programs around the country actually broke up more frequently than those in a control group who didn't get the relationship program. The program also prompted a drop in the involvement of fathers and the percentage who provided financial support.

Isn't that wonderful? Taxpayers are financing programs that undermine marriage. Not that we should be surprised by that results. The federal government declared a "War on Poverty" and [wound up increasing dependency and destitution.](#)

And even when researchers found results that vaguely could be interpreted in a positive fashion, the cost was absurd.

...married couples who participated in a government-funded relationship class reported being somewhat happier and having slightly warmer relationships with their partners. But the cost of this slight bump in happiness in the Supporting Healthy Marriage program was a whopping \$7,000 to \$11,500 per couple. Imagine how much happier the couples would have been if they'd just been handed with cash.

One would hope that this evidence of government failure would motivate GOPers to eliminate this example of waste. But I wouldn't recommend holding your breath until that happens.

Given the underwhelming track record of the federal marriage program, it would seem a ripe target for GOP budget hawks, especially given that many of the original proponents of the program are no longer in Congress to defend it. Instead, in November 2010, Congress allocated another \$150 million for healthy marriage and fatherhood related programs, with another \$150 million budgeted for 2013. And this fall HHS doled out \$120 million worth of grants.

What really irks me is that a former Bush Administration official defends the marriage handouts because we waste even more money on a Head Start program that doesn't produce good results.

Ron Haskins, a marriage program supporter who is a former adviser to Bush on welfare issues and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, thinks Obama did the right thing. He points out that research on poverty programs beloved by liberals, such as Head Start, doesn't look so good either, but that doesn't mean the government should simply get rid of it. "When there's tremendous pressure on the budget, there is a reason for reducing the spending," he says. "The exception is, if it's a new program you ought to try to figure out if you can improve it." Haskins notes that in the grand scheme of the federal budget, the marriage program is but a blip. "We don't spend a lot of money on these programs. [We spend] \$7 billion on Head Start, but not even a \$100 million on these [marriage] programs."

I realize this is heresy in Washington, but what would be wrong with saying, "Neither marriage programs nor Head Start generate positive results, so let's get rid of both and save \$7.1 billion."

No wonder we're likely going to be another Greece in just a few decades.

P.S. I shouldn't have to write this (especially since I've already explained [my socially conservative inclinations](#)), but allow me to deflect foolish attacks by saying that being against federal programs to subsidize marriage doesn't make me anti-marriage. I like softball, apple pie, chocolate milk shakes, and the Georgia Bulldogs football

team, but I don't want the federal government subsidies for any of those things either. Indeed, I fear subsidies and handouts [will have a negative impact](#).

P.P.S. The conservatives who support these programs are making the mistake of legislating based on good intentions. They correctly understand that stable marriages are a good thing (as [Walter Williams has explained](#), an intact family is a sure-fire way of avoiding poverty if accompanied by a high school education, any sort of job, and obeying the law), but they erroneously jump to the conclusion that a good thing can be made better with money from the federal government.

P.P.P.S. Conservatives who want stronger marriages and healthier families should concentrate on ending the pernicious welfare handouts that, for all intents and purposes, replace fathers with government programs. I won't pretend that's a full solution because it's not easy to put toothpaste back in a tube, but it can't hurt given the strong correlation between the growth of the welfare state and the decline in stable low-income families.