



Freedom and Responsibility

Why High Moral Standards are Crucial to Sound Public Policy

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THE SUCCESS OF THE GREAT AMERICAN EXPERIMENT DEPENDS UPON A VIRTUOUS AND EDUCATED CITIZENRY. THIS DEPENDENCE IS NECESSITATED BY THE MYRIAD OF RESPONSIBILITIES THAT ARE ASSOCIATED WITH LIBERTY. AS GEORGE BERNARD SHAW SAID, “LIBERTY MEANS RESPONSIBILITY. THAT IS WHY MOST MEN DREAD IT.”¹ THIS FUNDAMENTAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIBERTY AND RESPONSIBILITY THAT THE FOUNDERS WEAVED INTO THE AMERICAN SYSTEM OF SELF-GOVERNANCE HEARKENS TO A MUCH OLDER AND WISER SOURCE—SCRIPTURE. “FROM EVERYONE TO WHOM MUCH HAS BEEN GIVEN, MUCH WILL BE REQUIRED; AND FROM THE ONE TO WHOM MUCH HAS BEEN ENTRUSTED, EVEN MORE WILL BE DEMANDED” (LUKE 12:48). AMERICANS “HAVE BEEN THE RECIPIENTS OF THE CHOICEST BOUNTIES OF HEAVEN,” AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN PROCLAIMED IN 1863.² THEREFORE, AMERICANS CARRY SOME OF THE GREATEST RESPONSIBILITIES AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A NATION TO PRESERVE AND PROMOTE THOSE LIBERTIES.

Our nation’s second President, John Adams, penned the following on June 21, 1776:

Statesmen, my dear Sir, may plan and speculate for liberty, but it is Religion

and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles upon which Freedom can securely stand. The only Foundation of a free Constitution is pure Virtue, and if this cannot be inspired into our People in a greater Measure, than they have it now, they may change their Rulers and the forms of Government, but they will not obtain a lasting liberty.³

Liberty is dependent upon virtuous behavior and morality. Likewise, prudent public policy expects and encourages citizens to seek the best for themselves and for others. While acknowledging that people are not perfect, the standard in public policy should be for the highest personal and common good. This is why the North Carolina Family Policy Council works on a wide variety of divergent policy issues, such as gambling, alcohol and drug policy, pornography, parental rights, education policy and curricula, and religious freedom. Each of these issues is closely connected to the vital importance of virtue and personal responsibility in maintaining a healthy society.

Personal Responsibility

Because the American experiment in self-governance relies so heavily on a moral citizenry, public policy should be oriented toward a high moral standard of behavior that benefits individuals, and thereby society as a whole. Issues that at first seem to be solely personal in nature—gambling, alcohol and drug use, and pornography—actually have a broader impact in the way they alter the relationships between individual participants, and those with whom they come in contact.

Gambling

The harms to both individuals and communities that are associated with gambling are widespread and well documented. The financial, emotional, relational, and social costs that accompany the inevitable rise in gambling addicts when the practice is legalized provide ample reasoning for lawmakers to reject any expansion of gambling. Nationwide, five percent of the adult population that gamble are estimated to be addicted to gambling (either as pathological or problem gamblers).⁴ Pathological gambling is defined by the American Psychological Association (APA) as individuals who exhibit more than five of the 10 criteria the APA has outlined to diagnose someone with a gambling problem, while a problem gambler exhibits several, but less than five, of the APA’s criteria.⁵ The costs associated with gambling addiction far outweigh any alleged benefit to gambling legalization in terms of individual choice or government tax collections.

Familial Costs. Gambling addiction destroys not only the lives of those who participate, but also the financial and emotional stability of their families.

Families of problem gamblers report increased physical and emotional abuse of spouses and children, divorce, child neglect, and alcohol and drug abuse. Children of compulsive gamblers are more likely to drink alcohol, smoke, overeat, use drugs, and to develop a gambling disorder of their own.⁶

Economic Costs. Individuals, families, and communities are also then forced to take on the additional financial burden of caring for and treating gambling addicts. The economic costs of problem and pathological gambling include costs related to crime, business losses, bankruptcy, suicide, illness, social services, and family issues.⁷ In addition, research consistently finds that gambling operations are associated with increased crime rates in the surrounding community. A 1999 report by Drs. William Thompson and Frank Quinn, which analyzed the economic cost of video poker in South Carolina, conservatively estimated that each pathological gambler cost the people of South Carolina \$6,299 annually (\$1,479 of this in government services). Each problem gambler cost South Carolinians \$3,338.⁸ A 2010 national evaluation of gambling costs by Focus on the Family estimated that pathological gambling in adults costs about \$12,205 per addicted gambler, per year in the United States. The report estimated that problem gambling costs \$3,478 per adult problem gambler, per year.⁹

Alcohol

Alcohol is not an ordinary commodity. It represents the number one drug problem in the United States. As a “control” state, where the distribution and sale of alcohol is heavily regulated, North Carolina’s system of alcohol distribution is designed to protect the public as much as possible from alcohol problems, while generating significant revenue for the government. This carefully developed control system is intentional in its attempt to limit alcohol consumption, and thereby reduce the prevalence of alcohol-related harms in North Carolina.

Risks. North Carolina has made a public policy decision to work toward protecting youth from the lure of one of the most tempting and seemingly innocuous drugs on the market by limiting the availability of alcohol across the state. Part of this decision is based on evidence that shows a link between alcohol availability and increased violence.¹⁰ Increased availability of alcohol is also linked to excessive drinking, drunk driving, and alcohol-related assault and injury.¹¹ According to a 2010 *Lancet* study, alcohol causes more harm than crack cocaine or heroin. With an overall score of 72, alcohol was rated the most harmful drug to society, and the fourth most harmful drug to individual users.¹² The data is no better from a cost perspective. In 2008, the North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force on Substance Abuse Services reported to the North Carolina General Assembly that underage drinking costs the state an estimated \$1.2 billion annually.¹³

Marijuana

Laws related to marijuana are yet another example of the responsibility borne by each citizen to make wise and healthy choices, as well as the role of government to enact public policy that sets a high standard of behavior (and enforces that standard) for the benefit of both individuals and society. The federal government rightly classifies marijuana as a Schedule 1 controlled substance based on the drug’s high potential for abuse, lack of acceptable medical use in treatment, and “lack of accepted safety.”¹⁴ This classification is even more justified today in light of the increased potency of the drug.¹⁵ Nonetheless, efforts continue on the state and federal levels to legalize the use of this drug for medicinal and recreational purposes.

Health Risks. Despite arguments that marijuana use only impacts the user, taxpayers across the country are already incurring the cost of marijuana-related emergency room visits.¹⁶ Marijuana use in either the short-term or long-term brings an array of negative health effects, including impaired memory and motor coordination; altered judgment, decision-making, and mood; cardiac, respiratory, and psychiatric complications; and poorer educational and job outcomes.¹⁷ These risks are exacerbated in youth populations.

The drug’s addictive nature brings with it the cost to suffering individuals of lost educational, career, and personal success. However, addicts of any kind, from gambling to alcohol to marijuana, incur a social cost as well in the form of lack of productivity and increased dependency on government programs.

Pornography

Exposure to pornography, whether by adults or children, hurts individuals, families, and society. As Dr. Patrick Fagan explained in his 2010 article on the topic in this publication:

Pornography has significant effects during all stages of family life. For a child exposed to pornography within a family setting, pornography causes stress, and

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increases the risk for developing negative attitudes about the nature and purpose of human sexuality. For adolescents who view pornography, their attitudes toward their own and others' sexuality change, and their sexual expectations and behavior are shaped accordingly. For adults, pornography has harmful and even destructive effects on marriage.¹⁸

Dr. Fagan's research found an assortment of personal and social ills associated with consumption of pornography, including: the commodification of women as "sex objects;" increased risk of job loss, financial strain,¹⁹ separation, and divorce;²⁰ decreased parental attention to children;²¹ lower self-esteem; loneliness; depression;^{22 23 24} increased sexual intercourse with non-romantic friends;²⁵ increased likelihood of teenage pregnancy;²⁶ decreased intimacy;²⁷ a "diminished belief in the importance of marital faithfulness"²⁸ and increased "doubts about the value of marriage as an essential social institution and further doubts about its future viability."²⁹

Government's responsibility to protect citizens, in part by insisting on a high standard of conduct in areas that involve human interaction, necessitates

the enactment of public policy that (1) prevents the victimization and degradation of individuals (usually women) who are the subject of pornography, and (2) deters the production, dissemination and consumption of pornography due to its deleterious effects on society.

Parental Rights

Most parents will act in the best interest of their children, and government should err on the side of supporting fit parents, while being sure to have safeguards in place to shelter children from abusive situations. Even when government or society does not agree with the decision of an individual parent, particularly regarding a child's interaction with extended family, such as grandparents, or the family's preferred education method and curriculum, both state and federal courts have consistently ruled that in the absence of danger, abuse, or neglect, the right of fit parents to make those decisions is fundamental. In particular, the U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed that the parental right to direct the care, custody, and control of their children is a constitutionally protected liberty.³⁰ The fundamental nature of this right, the Court has stated, stems from the duty society places on parents to prepare children for life.³¹

Education

It is important to remember that the success of the American experiment in self-governance is absolutely dependent on an educated citizenry. While recognizing that American society and government is only functional when those living in and under it are able to make wise and educated decisions, it is also important to note that this does not mean all individuals will reach educational success using the same means. For this reason, religious and government leaders have long noted that parents are the first and primary educators of their children. Schools should be providing a supplemental support for parents in this foremost function of their vocation. Part of building a successful partnership where parents and schools are working together is ensuring that parents have the legal and financial freedom to make the best educational decisions for their children.

School Choice

The primary way for government to partner with parents in the area of education is by ensuring, as much as possible, that all children are afforded the educational opportunities that are most appropriate to their individual needs. This means recognizing that for some students and their families, the optimum environment is a public school, while for other families, it is a homeschool, private school, or alternative public school, like a charter or magnet school. In most cases, there is no one better equipped to make this determination than a child's parents.

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Still, the exact public policy approach to encouraging parental choice in children's educational opportunities can be debated. Reasonable arguments exist for everything from charter schools to vouchers to tax credits to government or corporate scholarship programs. However, the primary purpose of any of these efforts remains the same—public policy should empower, embolden, and encourage parents to make the decision about where and how their child will be educated without respect to zip code or income.

Abstinence-Until-Marriage

One of the primary purposes of sexual activity is the procreation of children. Because of this indisputable fact, government justifiably associates parenthood with certain above-mentioned rights in recognition of the tremendous responsibilities of parenthood. Both society and government have a vested interest in encouraging responsible parenthood. More importantly, children deserve to be born to a married mother and father who both want them and who are equipped to care for them. Abstinence-until-marriage (AUM) education aids this social aim by equipping youth with the knowledge and tools they need to understand the incredible responsibility that is parenthood, and, in turn, to understand that one of the primary and often unavoidable results of sexual activity is children.

Two primary reasons exist for North Carolina to maintain its focus on providing good AUM education to public school students: (1) AUM provides the best message and motivation to help youth make the healthiest and wisest decisions regarding sexual activity; and (2) Parents overwhelmingly and consistently support AUM programs.³² This high standard for students has helped yield dramatic drops in teen pregnancy and STD rates over several decades.³³

Religious Freedom

The Bill of Rights opens with a clear and concise statement of the fundamental right individuals have to practice or not practice the religion of their choosing. This right is prominently enshrined in America's founding document by intention. Many moved to the "New World" not based on an ethereal philosophical theory of liberty, but in search of true religious freedom. Several of the original colonies were founded almost exclusively by various religious sects looking for a peaceful life and the freedom to practice religion according to the dictates of their conscience.

Today, there is an increasing trend to deny individuals their constitutional rights to the free exercise of religion based on where they happen to find themselves at a particular moment—in a classroom, in a courtroom, or in a boardroom at work, for instance. However, it is false to posit that where an individual chooses to express some aspect of their

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faith automatically impacts the constitutionality of that action. Students, public servants, and business owners and workers do not relinquish their rights when they walk through the school or office door.

In fact, a strong argument can be made that such a stifling of religious expression in “public” runs directly counter to the interests of government and society in cultivating a moral citizenry that not only largely controls itself, but that relies on individual persons and organizations to care for the needs of others, rather than a burgeoning government. George Washington said as much.

In his farewell address in 1796, President George Washington warned:

Of all the dispositions and habits, which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness—these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity.³⁴

Indispensable Supports

The mission of the North Carolina Family Policy Council is to aid in the great work of maintaining these pillars of freedom and responsibility through our work on so many of the issues that face families, society, and government today. Our goal is to connect the dots between apparently disparate issues that either directly or indirectly impact the health and well-being of individuals, families, and societies. By doing so, the Council helps North Carolina policymakers and the public become better equipped to craft public policy that will preserve the rights and opportunities that are so unique to the American way of life for generations to come. ❖

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