

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

April 18, 2008

In WSJ Political Diary

The Fiscal Consequences of Divorce

Families that stay together, save together. That's the conclusion of a new study indicating that U.S. taxpayers are forking out at least \$112 billion annually, and over \$1 trillion dollars per decade, on divorces and unwed childbearing. This estimate is based on federal, state, and local government programs and lost tax revenue.

Says the study's principal author, Ben Scafidi of Georgia State University: "These costs are due to increased taxpayer expenditures for anti-poverty, criminal justice and education programs, and through lower levels of taxes paid by individuals whose adult productivity has been negatively affected by increased childhood poverty caused by family fragmentation." Similar work by Robert Rector of the Heritage Foundation has found that children who grow up in fatherless homes are far more likely to have behavior problems, drug abuse, high school drop out rates, and to be in poverty as adults.

What can government do? The Institute for American Values, which underwrote the Scafidi research, recommends modest taxpayer funds to support efforts to decrease divorce rates and unwed childbearing. That may be a waste of money, as these are the types of activities best undertaken by churches and private support networks. The best hope is that the lesson will be taken to heart by the media, politicians and educators, reversing some of the casualness with which divorces are sought and granted. In the 1970s and '80s, a school of thought maintained that breaking up troubled marriages was a win-win. Feminists argued it was a form of women's liberation, the children were better off, etc. But a steady drumbeat of research has shown that in most cases almost everyone is rendered worse off by divorce and separation. That includes taxpayers.

-- Stephen Moore and Tyler Grimm