

Some singles: Child credit taxes system

By STEPHANIE SCHOROW

Some single taxpayers are casting an envious eye on those \$400 checks winging their way to married neighbors with children — but not necessarily because they want a seat on the gravy train.

Some view the tax credits as another example of the second-class status of unmarried Americans. Others prefer to see such funds go back into schools or programs that benefit all Americans.

But other singles, with struggling relatives and friends, are glad parents are getting a break.

The first batch of about 8.6 million checks worth about \$4.4 billion has been sent to middle-class families, as part of an advance refund on the child tax credit that was increased to \$1,000 this year.

The American Association of Single People, (www.singlepeople.com), an organization that seeks fairness for single employees, consumers and taxpayers, argues that poor singles need relief far more than some two-income parents.

"Single people without children are the neglected stepchildren of the political establishment — no one wants to claim them," said Thomas Coleman, executive director of AASP, which will change its name to Unmarried America.

Coleman argues the elimination of the so-called marriage penalty shifts the tax burden to single taxpayers — a shift steeped in politics.

Republicans push "family values" and Clintonian Democrats "wanted to win the family debate, and they started talking family, family, family," he said.

"It's the old shell game. One person gives and another takes. There will be some tax relief from the federal government and many states and cities are raising taxes."

Many singles, however, believe families do shoulder an unfair burden. "I think it's great because I think they were being overtaxed in the first place," said Matthew Stasior, a single 37-year-old Bostonian. "I'm an uncle; I have five nieces and nephews and three siblings, so I understand the burden of what they have to go through."

Other singles worry about the impact of shifting money from federal programs to private pockets.

A \$400 check "is not going to help people go back to work, it's not helping the economy," insisted Marsha Turin, a single 44-year-old Boston science teacher. The Bush administration "is cutting services that go to kids so kids aren't benefiting. Now, parents have to pay for things they used to get in schools."

"The fact (the tax credit) is not benefiting me is only a minor part of the issue," she said.

Ken Pierce, a single Boston-area resident, regards the tax break from another perspective.

"The federal government is simply providing subsidies for married couples with children, paid for by all taxpayers," he said in an e-mail.

"This is just another example of how the tax code favors married couples with children, over childless singles regardless of tax revenue generated and the usage of public services," he wrote.

Some singles say the credit is less a slap at them than a boost for middle-class families, some of whom are already well off. About 6.5 million low-income families — roughly those earning from \$10,500 to \$25,000 a year — do not pay enough income tax to qualify so they will not get a check. (Also, the credit begins to phase out for parents filing jointly who make more than \$110,000 and single parents making more than \$75,000.)

"I feel that the combined tax credit could have more impact by improving public education," said Paul, an unmarried 38-year-old Boston scientist, who preferred his last name not be used.

"I don't think society benefits if the individual family decides to use their credit to buy a PS2 or Xbox system."

Stasior, chairman of the Massachusetts Federation of Young Republicans, said that while he supports public education, he wants more power for parents.

"I don't think anybody could help a child better than their own parent. So I'd rather put the money back into the parents' hands and let them make the decisions about education and how to clothe and feed their own children," he said. Also, he noted, the tax credit was for those who paid income tax, which many poor people do not.

But taxpaying singles often have family pressures, Coleman said. They are far from the self-centered, carefree bachelors or good-time gals portrayed in the media. "The majority of singles don't live alone; some are caring for parents or others."

Coleman sees political fallout if tax breaks are promised to all and "a third of the people get nothing."

"People flashing their checks at work — that's when the anger and resentment comes in," he said.