

Culture

Singles' Group Calls Marriage Benefits 'Discrimination'

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Capitol Hill (CNSNews.com) - An advocacy group for single adults said Monday that federal and state laws and private employment policies designed to encourage traditional marriage constitute "discrimination" against those who cannot or choose not to marry. Pro-family advocates say both government and private industry have a vested financial and social interest in promoting the traditional view of marriage.

Thomas Coleman - executive director of Unmarried America (UA), the membership division of the American Association of Single People (AASP) - believes there is no justification for government or private businesses to encourage or reward marriage.

"Marriage, number one, doesn't mean what it used to. It's not 'till death do you part;' probably half or more of the people will divorce, and many of them will be in multiple marriages throughout their lives," Coleman said. "So it's gross generalizations, vague and stereotypical, and really not helpful to good public policy, as far as I'm concerned."

Data from the 2002 American Community Survey, released by the U.S. Census Bureau earlier this month, seem to support at least the first part of Coleman's claim. The research indicated that 49.4 percent of American households are headed by an unmarried adult.

Wendy Wright, senior policy director at Concerned Women for America, noted one of the main reasons for that large number of "unmarried" adults is lax divorce laws. She does not believe society should respond to the negative effects of one bad policy decision by promoting another.

"The reason we have rampant divorce is because we loosened our divorce laws and made it too easy for people to get divorced," Wright explained. "To point to a dysfunction and then say that we ought to encourage even more dysfunction is not a good way to run our society."

Wright believes Unmarried America either doesn't know or is choosing to ignore the broader benefits of marriage.

"Unfortunately, they appear to be rather selfish and narcissistic and don't recognize that family life benefits not only the individuals who are involved in the family, but also all of society," Wright said. "It's the foundation of a healthy society."

Most 'single' Americans are not currently living alone

The Census data also showed that of the 86 million unmarried American adults, 59 million share their primary residence with others.

"Most of the people live with somebody, in a household, in a family-type setting of some nature," Coleman said. "Yet, most of those families are not really recognized or properly valued by society, and the federal government

does not recognize or value those families in the way that it should."

While current cultural trends may lean in another direction, Wright believes governmental and business policies that favor marriage over cohabitation are appropriate.

"Those kinds of situations are often very unhealthy for the people who are involved," Wright explained.

"Take the situation of children who are raised with a parent and someone who is not their parent, boyfriends particularly, in the household," Wright continued. "That is one of the most dangerous situations for a child to live in. We certainly shouldn't be subsidizing that. We should be doing everything that we can to encourage people to choose healthy lifestyles for the sake of our children."

Glen Stanton, director of social research and cultural affairs for Focus on the Family, stressed that it is not just his or Wright's opinion that marriage is good for its participants, their children and society.

"The reason that we favor marriage in our laws and employment benefits and things like that is because marriage provides real, tangible goods for everybody in society as a whole, as well as business," Stanton said.

"They're just simply on the wrong side of a whole host and a mountain and a sea of social science research data, and they just have to pretend as if that body of data doesn't exist," Stanton said. "Really, social science doesn't come to any other conclusion."

But Dr. Bella DePaulo - chairwoman of the academic advisory board of the Spectrum Institute, the research and policy division of the AASP - called that mountain of research documenting better societal performance by married heterosexual couples and their children "a very select molehill."

"What was important to the quality of the children's outcomes was not the structure of the family, namely whether they had two parents or one, but what went on within that family," DePaulo claimed.

"Having just one parent does not mean that there is only one adult in the lives of those children," DePaulo added. "If you talk to single-parent families and find out what their relationship really is, what their social network is, often they do have a whole network of people who care about the child and about them."

Stanton said UA and its supporters cannot "just pretend that one relationship is just like another relationship."

"They are assuming that single people provide the same sort of social benefits that married people do," Stanton said.

"But if you look at the things that a good, healthy community thrives on - and that is: good, happy, healthy people; people who show up for work, show up on time, work hard when they're there; save and invest more money; raise kids that stay out of trouble with the law, stay out of all kinds of problem behaviors, do better in school, graduate from school," Stanton continued, "one of the primary indicators for all of that is marital status for the adults and marital status for the parents of children."

Stanton noted that the benefits of marriage extend beyond the relationship and the employment situation.

"Married people engage in less risky behavior, [and] they're more responsible," Stanton said. "They tax the healthcare system less for any physical or emotional problems, and when they do suffer from these problems, they recover more quickly and successfully."

"Pick out any imaginative 'well-being measure' that you can think of," Stanton added. "You're going to find that, relative to marital status, married people do better."

Legalization of homosexual sodomy may help Unmarried America's campaign

Coleman believes the Supreme Court's recent decision in [Lawrence v. Texas](#), which found laws against homosexual sodomy to be discriminatory, will help his cause.

"They said the Texas law was unconstitutional, so really, it's any law that criminalizes private sexual relations between consenting adults is unconstitutional, is an infringement of liberty," Coleman argued. "They basically, kind of, opened the door to constitutional rights and arguments that there are constitutional protections for unmarried persons and that discrimination on the basis of marital status is not going to just automatically pass muster any longer."

Coleman argues that because unmarried majorities currently exist in 13 states, 132 congressional districts and more than 300 U.S. cities, single Americans have a right to demand political action.

"The demographics alone really call for special attention by Congress and the president," Coleman said.

UA wants federal and state legislation to counter the many laws, regulations and policies that it alleges "unfairly discriminate against people" based on their marital status, including:

- Reduced federal and state income taxes for some married couples, especially those with minor children that are not available to unmarried couples;
- Deferral of income and estate taxes on money and property left to surviving spouses not automatically available to survivors of an unmarried decedent's choice;
- Social Security survivor benefits for the spouse of a deceased worker that are not available to so-called "domestic partners" of deceased contributors;
- The use of unmarried cohabitation after a divorce as grounds to terminate the cohabitating party's custody of children or visitation rights;
- Employer-sponsored health insurance and other benefits offered to spouses and children of married workers that unmarried employees are not given for others of their choosing;
- Refusal by some landlords to rent or lease housing to unmarried adults for the purpose of cohabitation;
- Inclusion of marital status as a rating factor for automobile, health and property insurance; and
- Discounts and perks offered by businesses and organizations to spouses of members that are not available to individuals designated as "domestic partners" by single members.

"At a time when we have almost half of the households in the nation being headed by unmarried adults, and it's going to be increasing to an unmarried majority," Coleman argued, "it's time for a comprehensive national policy prohibiting marital status discrimination in all forms, just like other types of discrimination are prohibited on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, disability and all of that."

Wright believes the UA "wish list" provides keen insight into their "true motives."

"This shows that this is being driven by greed. This is all about: 'What more can I get?'" Wright said. "We shouldn't completely overhaul our entire society just to appease a few selfish people."

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