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STATE OF MINNESOTA

A SPECIAL REPORT on FAMILIES

By the Governor's Task Force on Families



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Letter to the Reader

The Governor's Task Force on Families was established by an executive order of Governor Rudy Perpich in May, 1978 to "review ways in which existing public policies and programs are affecting families in Minnesota and to recommend legislative or executive actions which might be supportive of families." He requested an initial report by late November; this is that report. Before you proceed to read it, we would like to share with you something about the membership of the Task Force and the procedures we used in formulating these particular recommendations.

The fifteen members of the Governor's Task Force on Families were chosen to be a representative body of Minnesota citizens. The members hail from all areas of the state except the extreme Northwest. The members' ages cover a fifty year span. The diversity of ethnic and minority groups in the state were mirrored in the Task Force. In terms of marital and family experience, two members of the Task Force were widowed, two divorced, one never married, and the other ten married. A majority of the group had families of two or more children. Of the five unmarried members, two are single parents.

Task Force members brought a range of occupational backgrounds to their work. Some have special expertise on family issues. One member, for example, is an attorney who serves as a family court referee. Two members have been social workers. One is a college professor who has studied the history of American family life.

Three legislators sit on the Task Force. One member is a teacher; another an educational consultant. Some are full time homemakers. One member serves as an executive to a large corporation; another has his own business. One member works with and for migrants. Two members depend on some form of public assistance for their incomes. Our oldest member is an activist with experience in the labor movement.

Despite differences in experience and viewpoints, the group was able to work with surprising ease. Early in our discussions we discovered that we shared certain assumptions and beliefs about family life and the role of public policy. As we debated certain issues, these assumptions became guiding principles by which we evaluated various sides of issues.

How did the Governor's Task Force on Families gather its information and arrive at conclusions? We began by attending the two-day Governor's Conference on Families held in Brooklyn Park in late May. This experience served as a "crash course" introducing Task Force members to current problems and policy debates concerning Minnesota's families.

Thereafter the Task Force held day-long sessions once a month. A three person steering committee consisting of the chairperson, the vice-chairperson, and the staff coordinator met frequently to select topics and to invite professionals from the community to assist the Task Force in its deliberations. Initially the Task Force decided to examine five major

areas: health care, economics and employment, education, the legal system, and social services, especially as these related to families. Later, we expanded this list as we identified further concerns.

Within each of these broad categories we selected two or three areas where we felt some particular policies were directly strengthening or weakening the family. In health care, for example, we struggled with the question of how parents who choose to care for handicapped members could do that without severe financial penalty. Under economics, we focused on the usefulness of alternate work schedules such as flextime. In preparation for each meeting members received pertinent articles or readings as well as drafts of proposals generated from the former meeting which would be voted upon. At the start of each full meeting, the Task Force listened to presentations from various persons who had special expertise on the subjects to be discussed. The meetings then proceeded somewhat informally with much open debate among the members.

As a citizens group, the Governor's Task Force on Families was particularly eager to hear from citizens like themselves. Five public hearings were held in various communities: Saint Paul, Minneapolis, Duluth, Northfield, and Brainerd. Each was extensively advertised beforehand. In this way we had an opportunity to hear the ideas and concerns of family members in Minnesota and to discuss our tentative ideas with the public. It proved to be an invaluable experience for all of us. We have flavored the report which follows with several verbatim statements which were transcribed at the public hearings which we think represent some grassroots ideas of the citizens of the state.

The work of this Task Force proceeded efficiently and smoothly because of the dedicated work of our staff coordinator, Sheila O'Fahey. We speak for the entire Task Force in saying that the opportunity to work with her has been a genuine pleasure. We are grateful too, for the trust and respect that developed within our group and we look forward to the opportunity of completing this work together.

We hope that you will not read this Report as a definitive statement about what is good or bad for Minnesota families. But we do hope that our Report will promote dialogue about the ways government at all levels should affect family life. We would welcome your response to our work.

Grace Harkness
Chairperson

Kirk Jeffrey
Vice-Chairperson

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Plaintalk from Public Hearings

"I like to define a family as a group who possesses an irrational commitment to one another's welfare."

"I do not believe the family is breaking down. But, the family has changed. That is part of the strength of the family: the ability to change and the diversity of families."

"It seems to me that people that lead a normal family life are not noticed. What about someone saying, 'Hey, you guys, you're doing a good job.' Social services are always helping the poor or families that are broken up. No one rewards people who stick together in hard times."

Introduction: Guiding Principles

Though the United States cultivates some of its finest myths around the notion of "family", it has no explicit public policy on families to guide its decision-makers. Some may argue that this is just as well since a government ought to interfere as little as possible in the private lives of its citizens. But this Task Force has found that, consciously or not, policy-makers make choices daily which influence the well-being of all our families for good or ill. Because most decisions are made with no explicit understanding as to how they may affect families, an "implicit family policy" gradually develops. One of the primary goals of this Task Force has been to recognize first what such a policy is and what its implications for Minnesota families are.

We should first state that there is no one single family policy which could be developed which would equally benefit all families. Policies designed to benefit one group of people may discriminate against another. For example, a State Department of Transportation may decide to build a freeway through a downtown district so that suburban commuters can get home faster, perhaps to have more time with their families. But the decision may dislocate other families who have established strong roots in an ethnic neighborhood. Again, a State Department of Education, in

an attempt to create better racial balance among schools, may decide to "consolidate" some local schools, thus causing distress to those parents and children involved in the change. Tax policies designed to give a break to families where both partners work, may be viewed as discriminatory to those families where a wife works at home.

Although no single family policy would benefit all families, this Task Force does believe that policy decisions on all levels of government should be examined as to how these policies affect families in general. Furthermore we believe that if various families had more information about the impact of various legislative and administrative decisions on their lives, they would be in a better position to have a voice in the shaping of these policies. Families, unlike other groups in our society, have no lobby to speak out for their interests. So they need as much information as they can get in order to lobby for themselves.

When this Task Force began its meetings in June, they had no "family impact statements" with which to help them in evaluating the various complex issues that began to emerge. This may have been just as well since the group was as diverse in its composition as families are unique in theirs. Reaching some consensus as to which issues to address and how to deal with these in a practical way was perhaps as significant an accomplishment as reaching the conclusions of this report.

In spite of the diversity of views among the Task Force members themselves, certain persistent themes began to become obvious in their discussion. These themes became such "constants" that they eventually formed the guidelines by which this group made judgments on issues. Thus, we present these general principles first in our report in the hope that they may be useful to policy-makers and to families in the creation of a public policy more sensitive to the needs and interests of families.

1. What is a Family?

There is no one "typical" family; public policy should respect the diversity of family forms.

Although only seven percent of Minnesota families fit the traditional picture of the nuclear family with the working father, the homemaking mother, and the two dependent children, an older brother and his younger sister, this one image so dominates the American psyche that many think of this one form of family life as the normative one. In actual fact, American families today embrace a wide variety of forms, cultures, and styles.

In thinking about families, we need to keep in mind the special needs of single parents; the "reconstituted family" in which divorced parents who remarry establish new families; elderly couples, both those who have been parents and those who have not; younger "child-free" couples; families in which other relatives live under the same roof as a married couple.

Besides these demographic differences, this State can boast of a rich heritage of cultural differences among its families. Minority and ethnic groups within the mainstream culture have made extensive use of the supports of informal networks of kin and neighbors. The importance and strength of these community and kinship ties has just begun to be appreciated.

The Task Force believes that public policy should respect the diversity among family forms. Whenever legislation or administrative policies are designed to benefit only the so-called "typical family of four" other kinds of families can be unconsciously viewed as atypical or deviant and such thinking results in discrimination against those families who do not conform to the nostalgic model.

2. Reduce Stress

Although families face new problems and pressures, they remain society's most central institution for satisfying our basic needs. Public policy should therefore work to reduce not increase the stress on families.

Concern about the "fate of the American family" has become the subject of debate in public and private forums. Articles with titles such as "Saving the Family", "Is the Family Dead", "The Family in Crisis" have appeared in popular journals since this Task Force began its work. Some reasons for widespread concern are these: the national birthrate has dropped to an alltime low; more and more people are postponing marriage or choosing not to marry at all; the divorce rate is escalating; there is a dramatic rise in single parent families, many of whom face economic hardship.

But the Task Force believes that these statistics are not necessarily signs of family disintegration. For example, the postponement of marriage may result in more stable partnerships; while more people are divorcing, a majority of these remarry showing that couple's dissatisfaction may be more with a particular person than with the institution itself; while single parents are increasing, more children today live with one or another parent than at the turn of the century; for the first time in our history, families can extend four generations because of the increase in life expectancy.

We feel that the problems families face come less from conflicts taking place inside the family and more from the enormous social, economic, and demographic changes that create new pressures from the outside. Despite the difficulties that families face, the Task Force believes that families do remain the essential institution from which people can satisfy basic needs for trust, love, support, and security.

3. Expand Choices

Public policy should expand rather than restrict a family's ability to make choices.

An advanced technology has benefited many families. But the increasing specialization that accompanies such advances has often encroached on areas that once were considered the exclusive domain of families. For example, where families once thought they could take care of their own health needs with an occasional visit from the family doctor, now various members in a family must rely on several doctors for a host of health needs. Education in the broader sense was once seen as a primary concern for parents and local schools taught certain basic skills. Today a public school may not only offer a sophisticated variety of curricula choices but also carry on major family social services. Entertainment was once done within a family setting. Today it is another "industry" where families are seen as "consumers." In these and other areas, the once active family has become more like a passive recipient. It is not surprising that families feel a loss of control over the important decisions that affect them.

The Task Force believes that the proper role of government is not to supplant but to support families and to increase their ability to make more choices for themselves.

4. Emphasize Prevention

In developing a public policy towards families, "prevention" should be the model rather than "treatment."

Much of what this Task Force has seen in terms of existing public policy has grown out of a "crisis-centered" approach to legislation rather than planning of a more thoughtful and long-range nature. Although this "crisis-centered" approach to public policy is not unique to legislators, we have seen situations where a minimum amount of support to families at critical times could have prevented their collapse. Bills like the Early Periodic Diagnostic Screening and Treatment Act which tries to identify learning disabilities in the early years of childhood and the Early

Childhood and Family Education Act which provides numerous support services to families with children are preventive in their thrust and set a model for legislation of this kind.

However, many well-intentioned efforts to "save" families result in family breakdown and separation. Legislative efforts tend to be targeted toward specific issues or special categories of persons, whether these be cases of child abuse, juvenile offenders, or the chemically dependent. But this single strategy approach often treats the person as if his or her difficulty were unrelated to a total family experience. Generally, state agencies are not set up to provide either the coordination or continuity of services that families need when they seek help. When a family is in trouble, courts, police, and social workers lack the resources they need to improve a family situation. Too often, the only course of action available to them is to remove a person from a household either for "treatment" or for "protection." But even when such steps may be necessary, as in the case of child abuse, attention should be given to the dysfunctioning family with at least the intent of final family restoration of the family unit.

This Task Force finds that public policy is too ready to allow families to break up before they receive assistance rather than providing initial supports which could, in the long run, assist the family to stay together.

5. Children Come First

In matters of public policy, the welfare of children should have first consideration.

"The easiest people to ignore in American society are children. They usually accept being cheated with equanimity. They don't strike, they are just there." This comment by Vice-President Walter Mondale reminds us that the American love affair with children is more a product of TV commercials than of thoughtful public policy. Among 42 nations keeping comparable statistics, the United States ranks sixteenth in infant mortality and this ranking has slipped steadily in recent decades. But this dismaying statistic masks large inequities in our system. In 1974, the mortality rate for non-whites was more than one and a half times greater than for whites, the maternal death rate was three and a half times greater. We now know that lack of good prenatal care accounts for birth defects and for low birth weight which can cause lifelong illnesses for children. Yet many children are "at risk" because their mothers have no access to prenatal care. In 1940, one out of every two federal dollars went to children. By 1970, the ratio had dropped to one in seventeen.

Besides inadequacies of our health care system, children in our country are hostages to the fortunes or misfortunes of their parents. There is ample evidence to support the fact that children suffer from the effects of poverty far more than any other single group. While we can admit that "money cannot buy love," we also know that every index of distress in families is correlated with poverty --- from birth defects to school failure, from family breakdown to child abuse, from malnutrition to mental illness.

Some cultures and ethnic groups within mainstream America have always considered children to be the common concern of the community. But this perception is not that of the larger society. Instead child-rearing is seen as a responsibility which parents should assume without support from the "outside" community. And in many urban settings parents and children are increasingly isolated from the networks of care and concern that could reduce some of the pressures that make parenting difficult. This lack of support is reflected in the absence of legislation and of federal and state programs directly concerned with the needs and rights of children.

In summary, this Task Force agrees with this conclusion from the Carnegie Council's Report on Children.

"Our nation's professed belief in the importance of the family has not been matched by actions designed to protect the family's integrity and vitality. Although the sanctity of the family is a favorite subject for Fourth of July orators, legislators rarely address the question of how best to support family life or child development. We have no comprehensive system to guarantee adequate health care to families, as Canada and many European nations do. We offer inadequate income supplements to families, yet families bear the financial burden of rearing the young, who will make the future society in which we all have a stake. We have few programs or plans to help those who wish to be both parents and workers. We have been slow to improve the lives of parents who have suffered discrimination because of their color, and we have kept in positions of low earning power and prestige the people who most often care for children, namely women. We rarely even consider the effects of other national policy decisions on the lives of families and children. In brief, we have no explicit family policy but instead have a haphazard patchwork of institutions and programs designed mostly under crisis conditions, whether the crisis is national in scope (such as recession) or personal (such as the break-up of a particular family)."

Kenneth Keniston, All Our Children, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1977), p.78

Plaintalk from Public Hearings

"When I think of total health care, I include my mind as well as my body. The medical profession tends to separate mind from body, when most health problems are interrelated. People are hurting both physically and mentally but most often, the doctor who first sees them is simply trained to put things in and take things out. Mental health paraprofessionals should somehow be involved in working with family doctors."

"People's failure to seek the services of mental health professionals is often due to lack of adequate insurance coverage both in the public and private sector."

"There is an extraordinary amount of overlapping and duplication of services in the delivery of health care. At the same time, there are also serious omissions. Information and referral services become outdated as soon as they are printed. Screening programs often omit diagnosis and referral. How can we find out where the services are that we need? Cooperative efforts between all the agencies involved in the delivery of health care should be encouraged."

"How much money could we save if the present health care system was as committed to prevention of health problems as it is to the crisis treatment of health problems?" We have to make sure that legislation supporting health care has as its priority prevention of health problems."

Chapter 1: Health Care and the Family

A. Access to Health Care

Health care costs have been rising at an annual rate in excess of twelve percent over the past decade with the result that more and more American families are finding it difficult to pay for normal health care. Although American doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals are among the best in the world, an increasing number of citizens cannot afford their services. An estimated twenty-five percent of the people in this

country are not covered by, or do not have adequate health coverage. Almost forty million Americans under age sixty-five have no private hospital insurance at all. And of those who do have private insurance, only forty percent of their health care costs are covered by this insurance. In addition to this, twenty million low-income Americans cannot afford private coverage and are not eligible for any kind of public insurance.

But even if the majority of people could afford adequate health care, our present system is set up to treat illnesses rather than towards preventing them. One consequence of this is that families tend to "save" money by not going to a doctor until they have to. Some of the consequences of this policy are dramatised by these disheartening statistics:

-Only forty percent of the children in the United States are fully immunized against such diseases as polio, rubella, measles, diphtheria, and mumps.

-The most basic index of overall health in a country is a national infant mortality rate. Although Americans spend more per capita on health than any other country, we rank seventeenth among industrialized countries in infant mortality. Studies show that infant mortality rates in rural areas are more than double the national rate, and fifty percent of all maternal deaths occur in rural areas. (In Minnesota there are 297 towns without a doctor.)

-Low birth weight is the single best indicator of risk or damage to surviving infants. An excessive number of low birth-weight babies are born to poor and non-white mothers many of whom lack any access to good prenatal care.

In the face of a health system where crisis medicine holds a top priority and where the pattern is to focus on one specific ailment in a single patient, the American family faces a great dilemma. In the absence of a general practitioner it has to organize its own health care system by figuring out just what each family member needs. Then it must figure out whether this member of the family qualifies for health coverage. Many families will delay attending to health needs until a sickness strikes, especially since private health-insurance plans are more likely to cover the costs of hospitalization than the cost of a visit to a doctor's office or to a health clinic.

This Task Force believes that worries about health care and health costs are among a family's most pressing concerns. Whatever the state's public policy can do to reduce this stress ought to be an urgent priority.

Recommendations

1. We recommend that our national legislators support a program of National Health Insurance so that all citizens will have access to health care regardless of their economic situation. Since the costs of establishing a system of universal public health insurance is prohibitive, we recommend that when a National Health Insurance program is begun, that it be structured initially around the needs of children. If such a program covered children up through the ages of six with yearly increases in the ages covered, we believe that costs would be lower and the long-range benefits greater. Starting with children would hopefully exercise a new leverage on the entire health system which would push it in the direction of health prevention rather than health treatment.

2. Recognizing that maternity is a matter of fundamental social importance, we recommend that the Minnesota Department of Human Rights and the insurance division of the Minnesota Department of Commerce investigate those insurance companies in the State which are not in compliance with the Minnesota Human Rights Act as amended in 1977. We strongly urge that companies that discriminate against policy-holders on the basis of sex should be refused licenses. Examples of such discrimination include:

-not giving hospitalization benefits for pregnancy or giving benefits at a lower level than for other medical conditions,

-giving different income-loss benefits for pregnancy than for other medical conditions,

-requiring the employee to be the principal wage-earner or the head of a household to be eligible for disability benefits.

3. Recognizing the importance of good prenatal care for both health delivery and subsequent child health, we recommend that the Minnesota Comprehensive Health Insurance Act be amended to include prenatal care.

4. Although Minnesota law currently requires health care plans to include nursing home coverage or the service of a home health care agency for a limited time, the law does not protect families who are faced with a long-term care situation of a sick or elderly member whom they wish to care for at home. We urge that the definition of a qualified health care plan be expanded to include coverage for the purchase of some "at home" services.

B. Care for the Disabled

Of special concern to this Task Force has been the situation of those

families who would like to provide in-home care for a child or an older family member who is physically or mentally disabled. An irony of our present system is that a handicapped person can qualify for complete medical care in all kinds of out-of-the-home environments such as institutions, group homes, residential facilities, foster homes. But if a family tries to care for this same person in the normal and natural setting of the home, most often it can receive no financial help. Thus our existing public policy seriously restricts a family's choice of in-home care by providing a financial incentive towards institutionalization.

Presently a comparison of the costs of in-home care vs. institutionalization is being studied by the Department of Public Welfare. Whether or not this study confirms that one kind of care is more or less expensive than another, this Task Force believes that the state should equalize the financial incentives. We believe that families who choose to care for disabled members at home should receive some financial support from the state towards what are extraordinary family health costs.

C. In Sickness and in Health

The Task Force is disturbed at the numbers of elderly couples who are urged to divorce so that one or another of the partners can receive Medical Assistance to cover excessive nursing home care. The problem is that Minnesota's Comprehensive Health Insurance Act provides medical assistance on a sliding fee scale to nursing home residents under age sixty-five. But at age sixty-five, catastrophic health coverage ceases and the couple must pay the entire nursing home expenses out of their joint incomes. The effect of this method of evaluation is that the well spouse must assume complete financial responsibility for the expenses of the sick spouse. Often, in order to be eligible for Medical Assistance, the well spouse must divest him or herself of all assets thus requiring both individuals to become welfare recipients. Rather than forcing the well spouse into the welfare systems, couples are encouraged to divorce to avoid the almost total loss of all their assets.

Recommendation

1. Enact legislation so that an institutionalized spouse over sixty-five with higher income be allowed to allocate enough of his or her income to provide an adequate standard of living for the non-institutionalized spouse. This would replace the present system in which the institutionalized spouse must divest him or herself of all assets to pay for Medical Assistance support.

A model for the bill which the Task Force supports can be found in legislation passed by the House in the 1978 session (H.F. 2238). This bill also asked that homestead be waived in determining Medical Assistance eligibility. The Task Force recognizes that for such legislation to pass a waiver of some Health, Education, and Welfare regulations governing Medical Assistance must be obtained. The Task Force urges that such a waiver be sought immediately.

Plaintalk from Public Hearings

"Economic instability is creating pressures against forming families in the first place. Once upon a time if someone wanted to settle in Duluth, he could do so. He might have to first take a job in Virginia or Brainerd but eventually he could get back to Duluth. Today a job might take you from Duluth to the Twin Cities to Los Angeles. When one must be looking to a major move to another area, it's not conducive to making a commitment to one other person, much less to a whole family."

"As a professional home economist and the mother of three preschoolers, I am often confronted with a 'conflict of interests and needs'. Both my career and my family responsibilities are very important to me. I am presently employed under a ten and a half month three-fourths time contract. My salary is pro-rated according to the salary I would make as a full-time employee. The benefits are excellent. I have one extra day per week with my children. All of the above is an incentive to me to be efficient in my job role. More people should have the opportunity for flexible job scheduling."

"My work is with single-parent families and particularly with providing them with day-care services. I see single parents feeling hopeless in the face of the System. They don't feel they have the power to control their own lives in the face of government intervention. One woman came to me today. She was just three dollars over the income eligibility level because she has received a raise. I told her to tell her boss to cut her back a half day so that she could continue to receive day-care subsidy from Title XX."

"My husband had registered for WIN, but could not find work. The welfare office called me in and told me that if I continued to stay with him, they would take me and my kids off the grant and would come into my home and take my kids away from me. I asked them how they could take my kids away and they said they would prove me an unfit mother because I had no means of income."

Chapter 2: Economics and Employment

A. Importance of Jobs and Income

When the Carnegie Council on Children set out to do an extensive study on the needs of children in the coming decades, most Americans expected that their report would feature such things as the significance of early childhood programs or the importance of equal opportunity through good schooling. Instead, the weight of their report focused on this major finding: jobs and a decent income are the two critical needs of American families. Families that this Task Force knows and has talked to would need no research study to reach this same conclusion.

Many concerned citizens interested in making a public policy sensitive to the stresses in families have concentrated on provision of special social services, whether these came from schools, or agencies, or welfare departments. But too few people have paid serious attention to the powerful role economic forces play in the ability of families to function. In attempts to reform or change people, we forget to reform or change the systems which cause the most suffering to people.

In our society a decent income is a requirement for buying the goods and services necessary for a minimally livable standard of living. Likewise, jobs act as powerful symbols of personal worth, merit, and virtue. Though most agree that "money cannot buy love," the painful fact is that the absence of money strongly correlates with every index of distress among families - from infant mortality to school failure, from family breakdown to child abuse, from malnutrition to mental illness. The Carnegie Council on Children, in its book entitled All Our Children, reaches the conclusion that:

"When children absorb their parents sense of worthlessness or powerlessness, they often exhibit what psychologists call low self concept. Low self concept is often viewed as a strictly individual pathology caused by the failures of the family; we believe that more often than not, it is caused by the failure of the labor market."

In view of the above facts, this Task Force first endorses any and all efforts on the local, state, and national level to promote a full employment economy. We support the meaning of full employment that is stated in the preamble to the Humphrey-Hawkins Act, that is, "to translate into practical reality the right of all Americans who are able, willing, and seeking to work to full opportunity for useful paid employment."

Secondly, we believe that jobs held by those Americans responsible for the care of children should provide a decent wage, one that approximates the Department of Labor's minimum budget for a family of four. This amounts to approximately fifty percent of the national median income or \$7,000, (hardly a royal sum for a family of four). The sad fact is that there are so many millions of children today with parents working full-time who fall far below that small figure.

Lastly, for those parents who cannot support their families either because of the nature of the present job market or because of personal situations, such as a disability or need to care for young children, we believe that common sense and justice require that a government provide a decent income support system which eliminates the sharp cut-offs, high marginal tax rates on earnings, and the work disincentives present in our existing welfare system.

B. Need for More Flexible Work Schedules

Of particular concern to this Task Force are the millions of parents for whom the inflexibility of work practices requires an impossible choice between neglecting their children and earning a living. Over fifty percent of Minnesota families now have two earners or more and this rise in labor force participation has increased the pressures families face in trying to negotiate a variety of time schedules. Consider what happens when businesses open early, schools at a later hour, and kindergartens run for only half days. Until very recently, families always had to accommodate their needs to the demands of their job. Someone once commented wearily that "a family is what's left over when you are finished working."

Families are also prone to those accidents of fate which make the well orchestrated eight hour day difficult to manage. A youngster may need a parent to accompany him or her on his first visit to the dentist; a school may declare a holiday for a teacher conference leaving a working mother searching for child-care; a water heater breaks down but neither partner can leave work to let in a service man. Such examples can be multiplied a thousandfold. One single incident may cause little trouble but the cumulative effect of many of these situations can create much pressure for a family.

Recently, employers have experimented with innovations in work patterns which allow for greater flexibility of time for the employee. Most of these programs began as efforts to improve employee morale while at the same time increasing company productivity. Perhaps the simplest and most promising of these alternative work schedules has been Flextime. Here an employee can choose his starting and stopping times as long as he works a full eight hour day and is present during a core period from nine o'clock to three. Besides the obvious satisfaction which comes from having some sense of choice, Flextime would seem to benefit families, particularly those where both parents work. Under this arrangement, for example, a mother could arrive at work at seven and leave at three thus making it easy for her to be home when children return from school. A father could choose to get to work later, making sure that the children were cared for and off safely to school.

This Task Force wishes to applaud the Governor's action to make Flextime an option for all state employees. We hope that the successes of this program may encourage businesses to follow the State's example.

Recommendations

1. To support efforts by the University of Minnesota's Family Studies Center to seek funding from private foundations to research the effects of Flextime on family life.
2. To enact new legislation testing the impact of a variety of flexible work structures upon family child care arrangements among State employees. The following variations should be included in the test: flextime, 10-hour day, 30-hour week, 36-week year, job sharing, meaningful part-time jobs, and parenting leave with pay (e.g., caring for sick children) and without pay (e.g., long-term). The test should attempt to determine whether or not parents on flexible work schedules use less non-family care, were more satisfied with their child care situation, and were equally satisfied with and productive on their jobs. Rationale: changes in the structures of work which reduced or eliminated the needs for non-family child care while maintaining job satisfaction and productivity would be the most logical as well as the least expensive solution to many child care needs.

C. Who Cares for the Children?

Women have always contributed to society's economic life. They have worked in the home carrying out domestic responsibilities, raising children, and especially in earlier times, producing goods at home for sale in the market. The phenomenon of the twentieth century, however, is the increasing proportion of women working away from their homes.

In 1920, for example, only 20% of all women sixteen years and over were in the labor force. Today, nearly half of all women are in the labor force. By 1990, we can expect that one out of every two American workers will be a woman.

Most of the women in the labor force today are married, living with their husband, and more likely than not have children under eighteen years of age. The category of female workers who are single, separated, widowed or divorced, of whom a large proportion have young children, almost equals the number of never married women in the labor force. In fact 39% of all women in the labor force have children, 32% have children under thirteen years of age, and 15% have children under the age of six years.

The forces that brought women into the labor force are varied. Unlike World War II, women are not being drawn into the labor market by a national crisis but by powerful economic, social, demographic and attitudinal changes of which economic changes are the most common. Women must work to support themselves, their unemployed or underemployed husbands, and to keep up with inflation and our changing notion of what constitutes a decent standard of living. For example, two-thirds of the working mothers in the nation are either single or have husbands who earn less than \$10,000 per year, and therefore, must work in order to support or help support their families.

Once we accept the fact that working women are a permanent part of American life, we should be prepared to alter public and private policies to remedy the existing hardships and inequities and, specifically, to assure the young children of working mothers the care and nurturing they need to grow and develop to their full potential.

While different studies find different patterns of utilization all studies agree that the dominant child care arrangements are not licensed, and furthermore, most parents are happy with the person or place taking care of their child or children. However, there are still many parents who can't find or afford the \$1,700/year/child necessary to purchase satisfactory child care arrangements or have a higher preference for another type of arrangement, and the number keeps increasing each year as more and more children need care and fewer and fewer parents can rely on relative or neighbor arrangements for care.

Working women, their families, and their children are a new social and economic reality in American society. The Task Force believes that the State of Minnesota should adopt a series of basic, long-range strategies and specific policies regarding child day care if it is to positively influence the shaping of a better life for Minnesota's young children and their families.

Recommendations

1. To enact new legislation initiating a Child Care Sliding Fee Program for lower, middle-income families and appropriate \$2.25 million to fund the program. The purpose of the sliding fee is to help families "slide" from no-pay to full-pay as their income rises from 60% of the State median income (cut-off point for Title XX fully subsidized care) to 90% (e.g., for a family of four persons \$10,122 to \$15,184). Under the proposed plan, a family would pay 75% of the added income after added taxes for child care. Rationale: the sliding fee would eliminate the "notch" effect and provide families the incentive needed to become economically independent.
2. To amend the State Child Care Tax Credit by increasing the income limit for the full credit from \$12,000 to \$14,000. The current tax credit provides a 10% refundable credit for families with incomes of less than \$12,000 and a proportional reduction for families with incomes between \$12,000 and \$18,000. Rationale: the increase in the income limit would take the increased cost of living into account.
3. To advocate increasing the Federal Child Care Tax Credit for lower and moderate income families. The current Federal credit is 20% for families of all incomes. The proposal should provide an increase in the Federal credit to 40% for families under \$14,000 with provisions for a

proportional reduction from 40% to 20% between \$14,000 and \$20,000. Rationale: the effect would be to move toward a sliding fee system through the tax credit method and, thereby, further reducing the cost of the direct subsidy program.

4. To enact new legislation piloting a voluntary program for the regulation of one-family child day care services and appropriate funds. There is no method by which a person providing care in the parents' home can be recognized or credentialed, and there is no method less demanding than voluntary family day care licensure for one-family arrangements in the provider's home. Yet, there are a sizeable number of parents wanting to use these forms of care who also desire some of the benefits of formal child care services (e.g., checking of credentials, standards for care, inclusion in referral system). Rationale: a well-administered program of voluntary registration could efficiently and effectively regulate many one-family arrangements and, thereby, expand the formal child care system to meet more needs.

D. Work and Welfare

A question that continues to perplex those charged with making public policy with regard to welfare is: should those receiving AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) be required to work when the youngest child reaches age six? When public assistance was first provided in the 1930's, it was called Mothers' Pensions. It was intended to help mothers so that they might stay home and take care of their children. An irony of history is that, almost half a century later, the caring function so long associated with families is no longer considered a primary concern. Instead, those receiving AFDC are required to register under a mandated work program called WIN once their last child has reached six years of age.

We realize that, politically, it may be necessary to legitimize welfare with a work requirement. The problem with this attitude as we see it, is that it fails to account for two important realities. The first is that there is ample evidence to show that a majority of those receiving AFDC would prefer to work if work were available. A nationwide survey (Perry Levinson, 1970) showed that more than 80% of the AFDC mothers interviewed would like to work if they could find a steady job. And an extensive study of work orientations among the poor conducted by Leonard Goodwin found the work ethic to be just as strong among the poor as the non-poor. Welfare reform seems to be the wrong term. Welfare itself is not the thing that has to be reformed because welfare picks up the failures of all other systems. In many ways, the most effective reform would be a full employment program and national health insurance.

Discussions about welfare also fail to take into account a second important fact -- who the adults are who are receiving AFDC. In Minnesota, 93.2% of adults who receive AFDC are women. And the nature of the labor

market is such that only a small proportion of women have the skills and educational competences to obtain jobs at a competitive level with men --- jobs which would bring a livable income to a family. The average income for a female head of household in Minnesota was \$6,800 in 1975, whereas the average income for a male head of a husband-wife household was \$14,800. Without appropriate training and education, women have great difficulty in gaining access to those jobs which will bring to them and their dependents an adequate income.

Recommendations

1. Allow those who are successfully working at a job training program, i.e. the NON-WIN voluntary program to complete this program before having to register for the WIN mandatory program. Under regulations that went into effect as recently as last January, all AFDC recipients have to quit their NON-WIN educational programs as soon as the youngest child reaches age six and register for a job under completely separate WIN regulations. In other words, there is no relationship between the two programs. One concentrates on job training and developing skills for future job placement; the other stresses on-the-job placement with little if no regard for the recipients long range job needs.
2. The WIN program is structured with primary emphasis on placing people in jobs, at the expense of developing long-term work potential.
 - a. We urge that, for those eligible, information about NON-WIN services should be automatically provided as part of the intake process when a person applies for help.
 - b. State funds, supplementing Title XX, should be earmarked for NON-WIN services.

The Problem of Work Disincentives

According to a League of Women Voters' Report published in 1977, "existing" welfare programs have the unintended effect of discouraging work by "taxing" earnings at a high rate. Each program "taxes" wages by reducing benefits as earnings increase. AFDC recipients for example, are allowed to keep only 33¢ of every dollar of gross earnings about \$30 a month. If they also receive food stamps, their gross income from work could drop to 20¢ for each dollar earned. And if they live in public housing, the "marginal tax rate" is even greater. In fact, for families eligible for a variety of programs, the cumulative tax rate may exceed 100%, making work a money-losing adventure.

This disincentive for work is compounded by the so-called "notch effect", in which a recipient loses more in benefits than he or she gains in wages.

The loss can be substantial --- a non-AFDC family in some states will lose Medical eligibility, which can be worth over one thousand dollars in medical benefits, if its income rises only one dollar above the income cutoff. Similarly, a family receiving assistance under the AFDC program covering unemployed fathers will lose all benefits if the father works over 100 hours a month.

Thus, to mandate work for mothers who are willing to work but who cannot find appropriate jobs either because of a scarce job market or because they lack adequate training makes little sense. An emphasis on providing realistic job training and counseling seems more realistic and humane.

3. As a general policy, this Task Force would urge the government to stand neutral with regard to mandating work for those on any AFDC programs.

However, recognizing the need to work within the existing situation, we do heartily recommend that some of the confusions and inequities that seem to be built into the present situation be eliminated. Such confusions which are basically problems of the system itself result in unnecessary physical and psychological hardships for those who must cope with them.

The following are some areas that need to be changed.

4. The program AFDC-UF (Unemployed Father) should be changed to AFDC-UP (Unemployed Parent). Under present rules, if the father of an intact family fails to comply with the work requirement, the whole family loses aid. In today's labor market, a wife might be able to fulfill the work requirement if her husband could not. The AFDC-UF program was initially designed to keep fathers from absenting themselves from the home in order that their families could get needed aid. But in some situations, couples are being advised to divorce so that women can apply for AFDC.

Another inequity of this program is that if a father fails to comply with the work requirement, the entire family loses the grant. If a woman is on AFDC and fails to comply with a work mandate only she loses aid; the children do not. This seems clearly to be discriminatory on the basis of sex.

Changing AFDC-UF to AFDC-UP (Unemployed Parent) would allow the choice of who is to work up to the parents.

It has come to our attention that many women who are single parents remain tied to the WELFARE system and refuse to accept any raises in the jobs they have because of two factors. A slight raise in pay may make them ineligible for Title XX daycare payments (often as much as \$160 a month) and ineligible for Medicaid, which in the absence of any national health insurance they need.

5. To combat this "notch effect", we recommend that
 - a. Medical Assistance benefits be extended for a six month period for those who have left AFDC and
 - b. Introduce a state-wide sliding fee scale for child care for those leaving AFDC who need child care.

The Need for a Transition Period

The average length of stay for a family on AFDC in Minnesota is 25 months. Only 10% of those receiving AFDC are on Welfare rolls for a long-term. Most of those who apply for AFDC help have undergone an economic disruption due to such causes as divorce or to a sudden unemployment crisis. We believe that many such persons undergoing certain stresses could really become independent of the Welfare system completely if they could get adequate help in a difficult time.

6. We recommend that the State study the costs of allowing persons on AFDC who are beginning to work a "transition period" in which such persons could work and still receive their full welfare grant. We feel that such a "grace" period would allow a person to gather enough capital resources so as to make the leap into some sort of financial independence. The fact that a welfare recipient's grant is substantially reduced at a time when persons are trying to gain economic ground through working makes it almost impossible for persons to really break out of the system. Such a "transition period" should extend for at least six months.

E. Parenting: the Work of a Lifetime

Few activities receive so little recognition and reward in our society as parenting. Today, veterans of intense years of child-care get no medals and are often penalized when they try to return to school or to work. Parents who leave school or the work force to spend a period of time in raising a family often find themselves at a decided disadvantage if they attempt to reenter the world of school or work. Yet, without reschooling or some retraining, they may not be able to locate jobs which are as good as the ones they may have left. None of the valuable skills they have learned through their parenting years are credited by employers.

An even more painful phenomenon of this period is the rise of the so-called "displaced homemaker." These are women who in mid-life find themselves economically disadvantaged through death, divorce or desertion of a spouse. After investing many years in raising families, they are suddenly forced to support themselves in a work world for which they have had little or no preparation. Recently, the national Congress has given

some concern to this problem by passing legislation aimed to assist such persons in their transition from the home to the workplace. But the title "displaced homemaker" carries with it a negative and perjorative ring as if persons who may have worked well and hard in the home were refugees without position or status. The label does little to describe the real services of such "distinguished homemakers."

The GI Bill of Rights was a plan developed by the United States Government to reward veterans for service to their country and assist them in the transition from military to civilian life. According to this Bill any service personnel who had at least 181 days of continuous active duty became eligible upon discharge for forty-five months of full-time educational benefits, or the equivalent in part-time benefits. This allowance made possible the entry of many persons into programs at vocational and business schools, colleges and universities, or on-the-job and apprenticeship programs. These educational advantages gave many persons the ability to compete for jobs appropriate to their age and experience.

Another popular provision of this Bill was the provision of free vocational and educational counseling on request. The fact that the unemployment rate in this state for veterans is one percent lower than the state average points to the success of this program. It should be noted that the benefits of the G.I. Bill were optional and persons choosing to use them had to take advantage of the benefits within ten years after discharge.

It is only appropriate that a nation reward and assist those who have invested their lives in serving the larger good of their country. However, another group of people who deserve praise and help for an inestimable contribution to the good of society are veterans of parenting. Those who, by taking time to bear and rear children, are investing their talents and energies in a most difficult and precious human work. Such persons are making a Generation Investment. The Task Force on Families believes that the community as a whole should support the child-rearing efforts of parents in tangible ways. Parenting and child-rearing skills need to be recognized, rewarded, and emulated for the good of our collective futures.

We urge that a Generation Investment Bill be drafted which would be modeled on the GI Bill of Rights.

The Bill would offer the educational assistance benefits which are now found in the present GI Bill to any parent who has taken care of his or her own biological or adopted child for a period of at least three consecutive years. Since the first three years of a child's life are considered to be critical in terms of a child's ability to form attachments to a particular

caregiver, these three years of parenting should, insofar as it is possible, take place during this period. To be eligible for this Generation Investment Bill, a parent could choose to spend as many years as he or she wished in the work of raising children. Therefore, although the minimum period allowed before a parent might qualify for educational benefits would be three years, a person could extend the parenting years as long as he or she chose before declaring that they wished to begin their eligibility term.

Once they formally declared themselves available for their G.I. benefits, they would have the same ten year period to participate in an educational and/or counseling program now authorized by the Veterans Administration. They would be eligible for forty-five months of full-time educational benefits, or the equivalent in part-time benefits. These educational benefits allow a person to participate in public or private elementary or secondary schools; vocational, correspondence, or business schools; colleges; universities; or on-the-job and apprenticeship programs. These benefits include vocational or educational counseling provided by the Veterans Administration on request. Such counseling with a professional counselor can be of immense assistance in identifying suitable educational or employment objectives by helping each person to learn more about his or her own vocational interests and abilities, potential employment opportunities, and available training programs.

If the educational and job counseling benefits now given to veterans of war were extended to veterans of parenting, (most of whom are women) we feel that one of the factors forcing mothers to use the AFDC system would be greatly reduced. The Generation Investment Bill would also aid other parents, especially those in midlife who wish to reenter the workforce but who lack suitable education or skill to do so.

The G.I. Bill has had a positive and supportive image and does not recognize differences in economic class as do too many other bills aimed at job training. We feel that good arguments can be made that parents who spend time in childrearing serve their country as well as those who spend active time in military service. And in making a transition from domestic life to work life, they are equally in need of reward and support.

Plaintalk from Public Hearings

"I think that working parents should have time off work to visit their children's classrooms."

"I think the schools are taking on too much of the family's responsibility. When I see some of the things that are being taught in our schools, I get a little upset. Each of us has our own idea of morality and when the school takes on this responsibility, this is infringing on a family's rights. I think they should stick to education."

"There is such a gap between parents and children once they go to school, that it would take years if ever to close this gap. Everybody in the family seems to be going their own way."

"Better trust and communication is needed between parents and teachers."

Chapter 3: Education and the Family

A. Need for a Home and School Partnership

"In loco parentis." Once schools did stand "in the place of the parent." The neighborhood school was a much a part of a community as a local church or synagogue. Parents and teachers felt themselves in a mutual kind of relationship where the school reinforced the values and traditions of the home and the home took an active role in supporting the efforts of the school.

But the partnership of home and school has been difficult to maintain. The reasons are complex. With the advance of technology and the so-called "knowledge explosion," schools have become increasingly large and specialized. The mobility of today's families means that parents may not be sending their youngsters to the same school they attended as children. Some families fear that schools may be teaching subjects that really need to be taught within the family.

Though it may be more difficult for today's families to be active participants in the education of their children, the Task Force agreed that a sound partnership between the home and school is vitally necessary. The members also agreed that the word "education" should be used to include all those learning experiences available to families from the larger community.

The Task Force felt that one area in which schools could actively help families would be in assisting young children to learn the caring and nurturing attitudes they will need later as adult parents.

Childhood is a time in which people need to develop attitudes and skills of responsibility and caring toward others. If they do so, they are more likely to become successful parents and responsible members of society as adults. The family has the primary obligation to teach these attitudes and skills to youngsters; but in our society, this task is not so easy.

One major reason for the difficulty is that our society is more age-segregated than it used to be. Children tend to be separated from the world of adults; they spend more of their time in the company of friends their own age or of the TV set. Schooling reinforces this pattern by separating children of different ages into different grade levels.

An unfortunate result of this age segregation is that children have less opportunity to learn from the example of parents, and less chance to practice caring roles through relationships with younger children.

While raising children to be caring adults must remain primarily the responsibility of family and church, our schools could help in at least one way.

Recommendations

We recommend that the State Board of Education and the Department of Education help children learn about their role as members of families, now and in the future, by working with school districts to lessen the degree of age segregation in the schools. Specifically, we recommend that older children of both sexes be encouraged to visit classes of younger children on a regular basis to work as assistants to teachers, interacting directly with the younger children and helping them in some of their activities. We also urge that ways be found in which high school students could be encouraged to work with and help handicapped children in the schools.

The reasoning behind these ideas is that youths gain experience at helping others and thereby be assisted, in an enjoyable way, to prepare themselves to be responsible and caring adults.

B. Early Childhood and Family Education

The Early Childhood and Family Education Program, originated by Senator Jerome Hughes, is one model which the Task Force felt was a very

useful one in its ability to build a sound partnership between parents and teachers. The following description outlines some of its major features.

The Early Childhood and Family Education Programs work from the basic assumption that parents are their children's primary and most influential teachers. Therefore, the main thrust of the programs is to enhance and support the competence of parents in providing a desirable environment for the healthy growth of their children.

Because Early Childhood and Family Education Programs focus on the parent, they do not attempt to provide services such as full time day care. However, most local programs are set up so parents can observe and participate in exemplary child development classes about once a week. Although this provides some immediate benefits to the child, it is primarily intended to enhance the parents' role at home.

Instead of having "child development experts" imported from outside the community, parents from the local elementary school attendance area serve as a support group to other parents. In this way, parents have an opportunity to share their experiences with other parents --- reducing some feelings of isolation and helping to relieve some of the stresses of parenting. The emphasis on local community involvement helps strengthen and enhance the cultural diversity that should exist with parent styles.

Local autonomy is also achieved by the legislative provision requiring that every program establish its own local advisory council. Such councils are policy-making bodies. The majority of council members comprise the fathers and mothers of children participating in the program. Other members of the council might include interested clergy, health personnel, senior citizens, and other service agencies or school personnel, as well as people with some familiarity with the needs of children and families in a particular community.

Because each of the Minnesota Early Childhood and Family Education Programs is designed to meet local needs and differences, each is somewhat different from the other. Some of the activities available to the programs are:

- parent and family education through the sharing of experiences and problems; and guest lecturers and workshops;
- observation of participation in early learning experiences for children;
- center-based activities for parents with children and a separation time for follow-up observations;
- resource libraries for parents and children, which include toys, books and other materials;

-pre-parenting education for adolescents, including workshops on child development, nutrition, prenatal care and opportunities for interaction with young children;

-health screening and referral to appropriate agencies for diagnosis and treatment;

-flexibility in all programs to accommodate the time constraints for working and non-working parents;

-an outreach program including home visits for those families with some hesitancy to participate in group activities.

Because the Early Childhood and Family Education Program emphasizes prevention rather than remediation, respect for community diversity rather than standardization, parents and their children's teachers rather than outside experts, the Governor's Task Force on Families heartily endorses this legislation.

Recommendations

1. Enact legislation in the 1979 session to expand the Early Childhood and Family Education Programs from the present twenty-two sites to forty sites.

2. Suggest that the National Institute of Education or other such institutes select Minnesota as a national site for a longitudinal study on the cost effectiveness of Early Childhood and Family Education Programs.

C. Community Education

Because of declining enrollment and the fact that over fifty percent of the Minnesota households do not have school age children, education resources, buildings and personnel are not being used to their capacity. Children of all ages, adults, and senior citizens have education needs that can be met after regular school hours and during the day in buildings that are not used for regular classrooms.

Community education encourages the development and strengthening of the community through the utilization of educational services and facilities for all citizens in the communities. The investment in the public school facilities in Minnesota is over two billion dollars.

Recommendations

1. Support the concept of Community Education through legislative and executive efforts on local and state levels. Many Community Education programs focus on family involvement and serve to strengthen the family role in early childhood development.
2. Support efforts to seek grants on the national level to study how educators might better understand the needs of children and families through the formation of National Family Institutes for educators. These institutes would integrate the expertise of various disciplines - health experts, psychologists, writers, teachers, the clergy, social workers, government administrators and planners, and legislators.

D. Television and the Family

The appearance of a television set in almost every American home since World War II is a development of immense significance to family life. Studies show that children often spend more time watching TV than they do in school or interacting with others in their families. Children who watch a great deal of TV tend to show developmental lags, possibly because TV tends to crowd out other activities in which children might interact with their parents or others.

Studies also indicate that children who watch violent programs, including cartoons, act more aggressively and are less cooperative and helpful. On the other hand, TV programs can sometimes help children make intellectual gains or learn cooperative and helping behavior.

Through television, children are pulled willy-nilly into our consumer society. They are exposed to a constant stream of sales pitches and are introduced to values and beliefs which are often at odds with the values and beliefs of their own families.

Television is, then, an immensely powerful teacher which influences children's values and personalities as well as their cognitive skills and their knowledge of the world at large.

One writer notes "the tone of helplessness that surrounds the issue of television -- 'it's here and it's part of our lives, there's nothing we can do about it.'" But this Task Force believes that if TV is so significant an influence on the young, then we have an obligation to suggest some ways in which public policy might offer some help to families who are wary of the role TV plays.

Government is properly cautious about attempting to regulate the content of TV programs or advertisements. But through its mandate to provide education for its citizens, the state might help people to become more discerning consumers of programs and advertising on TV. Indeed, in this electronic age such a role should be an important one for our schools.

Recommendations

1. The State Department of Education should take initiatives in encouraging and assisting school districts to offer regular instruction about television and its multiple effects. For example, such instruction might attempt to help children understand the techniques of advertising and political persuasion as used on TV. It might offer young people the chance to talk about the values conveyed by the programs they watch.
2. The State Department of Education should also seek to cooperate with all communications media to provide appropriate programming for children and families.

Plaintalk from Public Hearings

"There is no sense of commitment anymore. My parents gave me a sense of commitment to all the members of our family. As a result of what they passed on to me, I think I'm a contributing member of this society. Sometimes when I've been out of work or things have been bad for us, I've been tempted to give up but I didn't because I believe we have to be faithful to our commitments."

"It is often extremely difficult to determine which divorcing partner is the 'wronged party.' Sometimes neither partner has done anything spectacularly bad - but the marriage breaks down anyway. Sometimes one partner will appear to onlookers to be at fault, but the other partner may have contributed in more subtle ways, over many years, to the failure of the marriage. Proving "fault" in court can be expensive, time consuming and emotionally devastating. Some people believe that divorce is wrong and are concerned that the new Uniform Marriage and Divorce Law will not punish divorcing couples enough. Let me assure them that most men and women who go through a marital breakup undergo a pretty severe financial and emotional ravaging. They do not usually need additional punishment. For the criminally at fault, such as wife-beaters and child abusers, there ought to be other remedies than through our divorce legislation."

"I received four purple hearts in Vietnam. But going through a divorce was more painful than any of those experiences."

Chapter 4: Legal Issues and the Family

A. The Right to a Father

Throughout the ages, the word "illegitimate" has been used to describe those children born to women who were not married. And the stigma of the label has followed each person born out of wedlock for their entire lives. In some ways, the label was intended to express societies' condemnation of irresponsible liaisons beyond the bonds of marriage. But visiting such a condemnation on the head of an infant seems illogical and unjust.

We also recognize that some couples enter into long-term relationships with each other without a contract of marriage. And when a child is born to this couple, the father may participate fully in the rearing of the child, only to learn that, if a disruption occurs in his relationship with his partner, he has absolutely no legal rights to the custody of the child.

The Task Force supports the legal right of each child not only to the companionship and association of both parents, but also to the legal benefits which might flow from both parents such as social security, inheritance, hospitalization coverage, tribal benefits.

Recommendations

1. The Task Force on Families recommends passage of the Uniform Parentage Act.
2. With regard to the limitations regarding the number of years that an action can be brought to determine paternity, we recognize that the rights of the child to establish paternity so as to benefit from whatever claims he or she may have upon the economic resources of a parent must be balanced against the reasonable desires of a parent to protection of his or her privacy. Thus in the writing of this bill we urge the legislature to try to accommodate this balance of interests in as equitable a manner as possible.
3. Regarding that section of the Uniform Parentage Act, requiring that any adoption proceedings be delayed for a ninety day waiting period so that the putative father can be informed of his rights to the child, we urge that the legislature give due consideration to the psychological data stressing the need for early emotional bonding between an infant and its primary caregiver. Although we recognize that the waiting period is designed to assure the termination of parental rights has been established before legal adoption takes place, we feel concerned that the length of time required for this, may damage the child emotionally in the interim. Thus we ask the legislature to allow the ninety day waiting period to be reduced or else to give the determination prior to the birth of the baby in those cases where the mother has decided beforehand to terminate her rights to the new-born child.

B. Marriage and Dissolution

Our culture tends to view marriage as an "affair of the heart" in which only the two romantic partners are involved. The image is far too simplistic.

In actual fact marriage is not only a personal decision but a communal

one. Every community has a vital stake in the well-being of marriage and family life. And the State is a rightful "third party" to all contracted (and non-contracted) marriages. We have statutes to determine who may marry and who may not, at what ages, and under what conditions. Hopefully, these statutes are set up to protect the interests of the married couple as well as those of the State. But the balance is a delicate one and the State needs to exercise caution in making its determinations so as not to infringe on the rights of the individual.

The State must also involve itself in cases of marital dissolution. It would be ideal if couples could resolve all their differences themselves. Generally, two parties who are experiencing great emotional distress cannot make crucial decisions involving such grave matters as the care of children, property settlements, and other important family matters. Thus, if there is an irretrievable breakdown in a marriage, the State has a role to play in helping to arbitrate differences and in making judgments that will ensure the good of all those concerned.

One of the great problems that this Task Force discussed at some length was the fact that the State makes education a prerequisite for obtaining a license in almost all areas except that of marriage. Yet this commitment places upon a couple lifelong responsibilities that they need to be aware of. The members of the Task Force would like to investigate ways in which potential couples could receive more help and education regarding marriage without at the same time interfering with the rights of individuals to privacy.

Recommendations

1. Urge the legislature to consider positive incentives or education to help people to view marriage as a long-term commitment carrying with it mutual rights and responsibilities. When dissolution proceedings are begun, the State should encourage the parties as much as possible, to resolve the issues themselves. Many family matters do not lend themselves to the adversary system of the courts. Public policy should support efforts towards the mediation of differences rather than the litigation of them.
2. We suggest that the state may have a stake in not having married couples divorce in too hasty or premature a manner. Thus we recommend that the legislature mandate a suitable waiting period once dissolution proceedings have begun but before stipulations have become unalterable. By establishing some sort of waiting period before the finalization of a divorce decree, the court is recognizing that there are necessary periods of adjustment for all family members that are emotional and economic as well as legal. A waiting period would offer all family members opportunity to experience the practical, psychological, and financial aspects of their new situations so that in reaching some final settlement, the parties would have a better base of experience from which to make decisions.

Obviously, there are some crisis situations where this waiting period ought not to apply. We recommend that the requirements of a waiting period be subject to judicial discretion to allow for those situations where such a waiting period might endanger or harm the parties.

3. We recognize that in dealing with a dissolved marriage, the "best interests of all family members" can never be adequately served. The most the court can do is to minimize the adverse effects upon all members in a family. We support the present legislation regarding the Uniform Marriage and Divorce Act in which "fault" may not be used either as grounds for dissolution or as a factor in making decisions regarding property division, maintenance, and support and where the conduct of a parent is only considered in custody disputes if that conduct affects the parent's relationship to the child.

Once there is a recognition on the part of the society that there is irretrievable breakdown in a marriage, we feel that the most beneficial thing that the law can do is to allow all family members to reestablish their lives as soon as possible.

In any marital disruption, there is often bitterness and blaming. If court decisions are made in a punitive manner, the acrimony may follow the marriage into the post decree period and it seems to us that this will prove harmful to all persons, but especially to children.

Even in situations where one or another parties is obviously "at fault", we believe that the decisions the court must make should be made on a basis other than fault.

Plaintalk from Public Hearings

"What happens when an Indian child is placed in a non-Indian home" The results of this are often disastrous in terms of children's security, development, cultural identity and family cohesion. The guidelines set up by Department of Public Welfare and Title XX are often adequate, but a breakdown occurs when social services are delivered. Every attempt must be made to educate social workers on the cultural identities of different groups."

"Children have typically entered foster care with the goal of returning home following the resolution of a crisis. However, the children frequently are not returned home as planned, but remain in foster care indefinitely, usually experiencing multiple placements. A great many of these children are or could be made available for adoption, yet few foster children have been adopted."

Chapter 5: Foster Care and Adoption

A. Prevention of the Need for Foster Care

Currently, there are about one-third of a million children in the United States living apart from their families and the number is increasing. Recent research indicates that many foster children have experienced quite extended time in foster care. One of the policy dilemmas involved in the care of foster children concerns the treatment of their natural parents. There is concern that government supported programs are often disregarding, if not actively undermining, the ties of children to their biological parents. Even parents who function in marginal or dysfunctional ways, or are unable to offer direct care to their children, can have psychological meaning and importance for their offspring. A large majority of the children in foster care require care because of temporary or permanent collapse in the parental functioning of their natural parents. This Task Force believes that the number of children entering foster care could be reduced if more supportive services could be developed to maintain the family unit. Assistance to local agencies is needed from the federal and state levels in order to develop preventive and early intervention services. We encourage greater representation of minorities in social service agencies because so many decisions regarding foster care affect these groups in significant ways. At the present time, money is available for the start-up of home-based care of families.

More research is needed to help professionals further understand family problems and effective ways of resolving problems. Given the poor experience of agencies throughout the country in successfully restoring families following child placement, we believe that the prevention of initial family separation is first priority.

B. Drift in Long Term Placement

In recent years, there has emerged an almost unanimous national consensus that, whenever possible, children in foster care must be afforded the chance for a permanent relationship with those who serve as psychological parents to them. There is also a strongly held view that extended periods in foster care, lasting more than several years is an intolerable state of affairs. One problem brought to the attention of our group is that of "drift" into long-term placement. Typically, children enter foster care with the goal of returning home following the resolution of a crisis. However, for various reasons, the children frequently are not returned home as planned but remain in foster care indefinitely, usually experiencing multiple placements. Although a great many of these children are, or could be made available for adoption, relatively few foster children have been adopted.

During the last legislative session a law was passed which requires more careful planning and periodic care review. An added grounds for the termination of parental rights was introduced based on "neglect while in foster care." One result of this new law should be more foster children becoming legally available for adoption. However, because of age, handicaps, or behavioral or emotional problems, many of these children fit into the category of "hard to place." Therefore, this Task Force believes that an expanded subsidized adoption program is needed to improve these children's prospects for adoption.

C. Expanded Subsidized Adoption Program

We feel that an expanded subsidized adoption program is necessary for the following reasons. The current subsidized adoption program is not being used to its full potential. In the nine years Minnesota has had the program, only 119 subsidized adoptions have taken place. During the same period of time, Illinois has had over 2,400 subsidized adoptions. The primary reasons for Minnesota's low level of utilization seem to be the following:

1. Counties may apply a very restrictive means test in determining whether potential adoptive parents are eligible to receive a subsidy.
2. There is a financial disincentive to counties to use subsidized adoption. The present subsidized adoption program provides for 50 percent State funding which, in many cases, is less than the State/Federal share for foster care.

Recommendation

1. Amend the Subsidized Adoption Statute (M.S. 393.07, subd. 1a) so that a subsidy will be granted on the basis of the child's need rather than on the resources of the proposed adoptive parents. "The subsidy may be for special services only (including, but not limited to, medical, severe dental and/or psychiatric care or treatment); or for money payments; and either for a limited period or for a long term; or for any combination of the foregoing. The amount of the subsidy may in no case exceed that which would be allowable from time to time for such a child under foster family care, or in the care of a special service the reasonable fee for the service rendered."

From the Report of the Children and Youth in Crisis - Foster Care Task Force Report.

Chapter 6: Family Violence

Nowhere does the conflict of rights between family privacy and public responsibility surface so quickly as in the arena of family violence. Though the reporting of the incidence of child abuse has increased dramatically in the past two decades (i.e. In 1968, California had 4,000 reported cases; in 1972, 40,000; Florida's reports jumped from ten cases to 30,000 over the same four year period), there still persists a reluctance on the part of the public to acknowledge the dimensions of the problem. Some suggest that this "selective inattention" stems from our need to think of families as havens of love and gentleness. Any evidence that conflicts with this nostalgic model results in a kind of unfortunate indifference to what is surely an acute area of public concern.

Family violence means repeated mistreatment or neglect by one member of the family on another member of the family resulting in injury or harm. These injuries may be physical: shaking, beating, or burning; verbal: excessive yelling, belittling, and teasing; emotional: failure to provide warmth, attention, supervision, and love; or inappropriate sexual behavior within a family. Though violence in families has existed for centuries, the concept of "family violence" is new. Because of the complexity of trying to deal with the family as a whole, people have tried to separate out the various members of a family who seemed to be either "victims" or "offenders." But this Task Force believes that this single-strategy approach whether to persons or to problems does not address the real causes of family violence and in the end, does not eradicate the problem. Certainly an abused child may need a temporary placement in foster care or a battered wife may need the protection of a "shelter." However, unless the larger problems of the dysfunctional family are attended to, the child can wind up suffering not only from his or her physical injuries, but from the deeper psychological injury of permanent separation from the home. Likewise the battered wife may gain help from a shelter only to have to return to a husband who because of alcoholism or emotional disturbance, may continue the pattern of abuse.

Recommendations

1. The issue of family violence should be a primary focus of concern for the Task Force on Families during the next six months.

In particular, the Task Force on Families should:

2. Assist various state agencies, in whatever ways it can, to identify agency responsibilities with a view to implementing programs within their own departments to reduce the incidence of family violence.

3. Endorse legislations such as the "Order for Protection Bill" and Child Abuse legislation that would require counties to prepare detailed plans on the implementation of child abuse laws.

4. Provide a forum for grass roots participation in the shiping of public policy on family violence by:

a. seeking the advice of various interest groups working in areas of family violence;

b. holding open hearings for the public to respond to policy decisions on family violence and to make recommendations for others;

c. assist in ongoing educational effort to make the public aware of the dimensions of this problem and of ways of dealing with it.

5. Integrate the information received by all such groups in a written Report that could be useful to the policy-makers at all levels of government.

Plaintalk from Public Hearings

"No housewife is ever 'unemployed.' A husband and wife constitute a productive team contributing to the overall benefit of the society in which they live. Yet, the state tax structure encourages both husband and wife to work outside the home, thereby making a social valuation of wage-earning wives as being superior to homemaking wives."

"I believe that the whole tax base needs to be studied and restructured with a view as to how it affects families, especially middle-class families . . . Taxes should take into account the different factors in families, like numbers and ages of children. Middle-class people feel squeezed by taxes. The poor suffer too. But the middle-classes lack advocacy."

"I am concerned about the costs of housing. In Minnesota 85% of the people are homeowners. We are a state of homeowners. But the costs of housing are skyrocketing. Perhaps we need to bring together the government and private sector."

Chapter 7: Future Issues for Review

A. Taxes

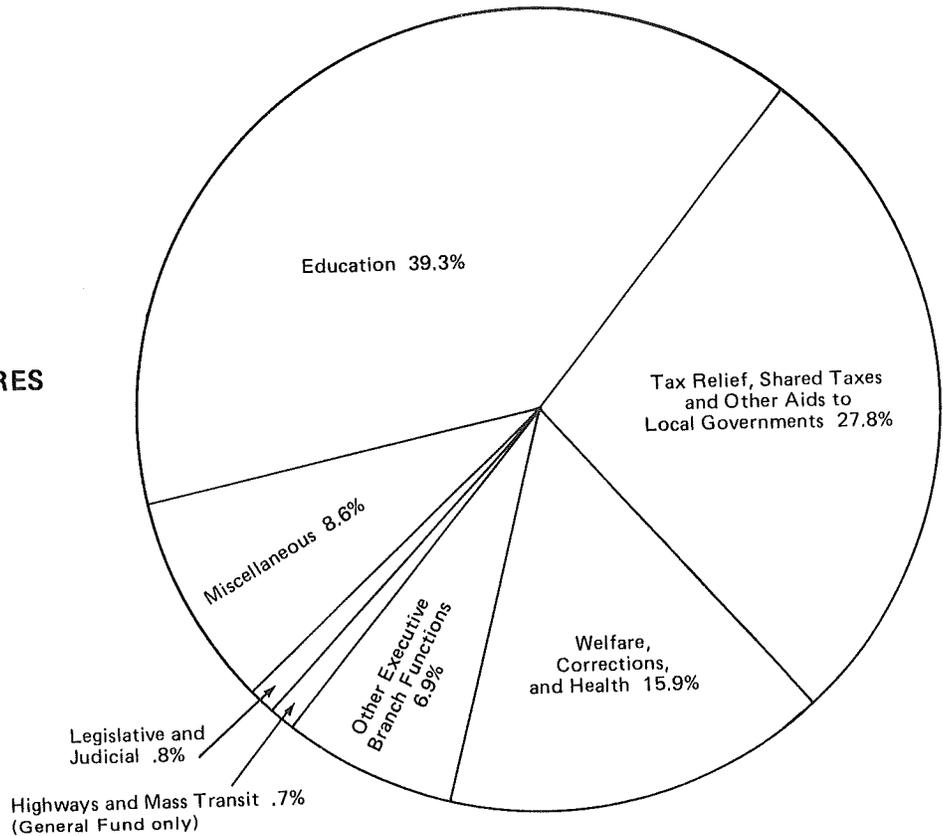
Taxes are the price we pay for a civilized society and the level of civilization that we have come to expect in the United States has come to be a high one. Many of those things that once seemed luxuries have now become necessities. When a family wakes up after an evening snowstorm, they expect that snowfilled streets will be plowed and soon. When recent floods hit various cities in the state, people were irate when their sewage system did not absorb the excess waters. If a fire starts in a home, we expect immediate help from the fire department. Likewise, we expect that our police forces will control crime so that streets will be safe for children and adults. Every city likes to provide its citizens with recreational opportunities like parks and libraries. Few people would say that any of these services should not be available to a community.

Another advantage that Americans naturally expect is that when all children reach school age, they can receive a free public education. And if they are either gifted or mentally retarded, we expect the Education Department to provide special services for these children. When students graduate, many families are glad if their children go on to state colleges, community colleges, or various vocational training institutes. These educational opportunities are subsidized through our tax system.

In the debate over taxes, few people would argue that a tax system is not necessary. The problem becomes how to decide which programs among many should tax dollars support and how should the tax burden be distributed among various groups. The following chart shows how Minnesota decided to allocate its tax dollars during this biennium.

ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES
\$6,414,423,689

(Net after deduction of an estimated \$50,000,000 in appropriation cancellations)



Taxes can also be used in shaping public policies. A tax system is one of the most effective ways of encouraging or discouraging certain social behaviors. A metropolitan newspaper described East Germany's astonishing baby boom. In 1972 East Germany was recording the lowest birth rate in the world. To stimulate the birth rate East Germany introduced a vast array of monetary incentives, ie., longer paid maternity leaves, interest-free loans for newlyweds, grants to families with new-born children. During the first eighteen months after passage of the law, there was a fifteen percent increase in the birth rate. While no one could prove the financial incentives offered by that government caused more couples to decide to have children, the measure made the climate for that decision more favorable.

On the other hand, taxes can provide real disincentives to certain actions that might otherwise occur. For example, if an elderly person can receive Medical Assistance if he or she agrees to be institutionalized, chances are elderly people might consider themselves a financial "burden" if they were urged by their concerned children to "live in" with them. This is especially so since the concerned family would receive no financial help from the government. Examples of how tax policies can exercise negative effects on families who wish to take care of disabled or elderly members were given earlier in this Report. What this Task Force wants to review in future meetings is how our present tax structure is affecting the choices families have and how equitably the tax burden is distributed among various kinds of families.

Meanwhile, the Task Force unanimously endorsed the one following recommendation.

Recommendation

Allow a tax credit to parents whose elderly parents or disabled children are living with them. In the case of a disabled senior citizen living with their children, a double credit might be allowed.

B. Housing Policies

The percentage of home ownership in Minnesota is much higher than that of the national average. This fact is not an accident of history but a result of tax policies like the Homestead Tax Credit and the Circuit Breaker. Certain tax incentives as well as specific housing policies in both the public and private sector have nourished expectancies on the part of various families. For example, many young couples who marry today

plan to buy or build their own homes. We like to think that elderly couples can live out their retiring years in the same house where they raised their families. Real estate ads publicize so-called "starter homes" and the assumption is that houses, like cars, will be resold again and again. Certainly, the notion of owning a family home is a built-in part of the "American Dream."

But given spiraling interest on mortgages, the inflationary costs of homes, rising energy costs, the "dream" seems more like an illusion to many families in our state. Perhaps in no other area is the inavailability of choices so dramatic as in the problems of housing. Consider the example of families who cannot find rental units that will accept children. At the same time, the couple cannot afford to buy a home. This one situation could be extended into many - each of which illustrating a different facet of the housing problem.

Since housing policies, like tax policies, affect all families, the Task Force felt that this area should be a matter of primary concern and careful investigation in the future. The economic, demographic, and social factors involved in determining how both tax and housing policies affect families are so complicated that the members of the group decided that they needed more time and research help before they could make informed judgments on some of these issues.

In the meantime, the Task Force on Families passed the following resolution in the hope that it would flex a very tight housing market while at the same time creating some opportunity for elderly couples to have wider housing choices.

Recommendation

1. Allow a one-time capital gains tax exemption on the selling of a home. The purpose would be to give a substantial break to people who are older and to give them some flexibility in their housing choices. The long-range hope is to free larger housing for the market without financially hurting their present owners.

Conclusion

Need for a Council on Children and Families

"Although there are more than fifty different services, through thirty program offices and four state agencies, provided to young children and their families in Minnesota, there is no coordinated planning at the administrative level and only limited cooperation among state agency program personnel." This was the finding of a Child Development Planning Project conducted by the State Planning Agency in 1974.

A further finding of the Report was that, "There is no coordinated public policy regarding young children and their families in Minnesota against which to evaluate existing services or the need for new programs." (The diagram included in this chapter gives eloquent testimony to the kinds of confusion any family might face in trying to find the help they need.)

Four years later, the Governor's Task Force on Families reached many of the same conclusions of this report. One theme that persisted throughout the Task Force's discussions was the overlapping, duplication, and lack of coordination among services to children and families. Even worse, there are gaps in the systems where basic needs are still unattended to. The absence of an adequate information and referral service results in the fact that many Minnesota families do not know where to go for the information and help they need.

The Task Force on Families agreed that the State of Minnesota should set up a Council on Children and Families under the auspices of the Governor. Certainly such a group could at least serve as an advocate for children and families and provide needed information and referral services. But beyond this, this Council should investigate ways to achieve:

1. more efficient organization and operation of the state - local - public - voluntary system of social, educational, mental health, and other supportive services to children and families.
2. better coordination and cooperation in providing or supervising the provision of services to children and families by and among state agencies and their local government counterparts.
3. more meaningful accountability by state agencies, institutions and individuals responsible for providing services in terms of quality, quantity, and cost-effectiveness of services provided to children and families.
4. the identification of those needs of children and families which the State has not yet recognized with a view to recommending appropriate legislative or administrative action.

Recommendation

Urge passage of legislation to set up a Council on Children and Families, whose primary purpose would be to clarify the responsibilities of the many state and local agencies involved in the provision or supervision of services to children and families, to resolve interagency conflicts in as efficient a manner as possible, and to work for the removal of any public policies on the state and local levels which prevent the healthy development of Minnesota's children and families. The Task Force further recommends that such a group or council should be set up under the executive branch.

Appendix

Summary of Recommendations

I. Health Care and the Family

A. Access to Health Care

1. Recommend that our national legislators support a program of National Health Insurance so that all citizens will have access to health care regardless of their economic situation; that this program initially cover the needs of children, emphasizing a model of health prevention rather than treatment.
2. Recommend that the Minnesota Department of Human Rights and the insurance division if the Minnesota Department of Commerce investigate insurance companies in the State which are not in compliance with the Minnesota Human Rights Act as amended in 1977; companies that discriminate on the basis of sex should be refused licenses.
3. Recommend that the Minnesota Comprehensive Health Insurance Act be amended to include prenatal care.
4. Recommend that the definition of a qualified health care plan be expanded to include coverage for the purchase of some "at home" services.

B. Care for the Disabled

Balance the existing financial disincentives for families who wish to care for physically or mentally disabled family members.

C. In Sickness and in Health

Enact legislation so that an institutionalized spouse over sixty-five with a higher income be allowed to allocate enough of his or her income to provide an adequate standard of living for the non-institutionalized spouse.

II. Economics and Employment

A. Importance of Jobs and Income

1. Support any and all efforts on the local, state, and national level to promote a full employment economy.

2. Support efforts to insure that employed persons with families receive economic benefits consistent with their need to raise a family.
3. Urge that government provide a decent income support system for parents who cannot support their families due to the nature of the job market or to personal situations.

B. Need for More Flexible Work Schedules

1. Support efforts by the University of Minnesota's Family Studies Center to seek funding to study how the implementation of Flextime among State employees affects their family life.
2. Enact legislation to test the impact of a variety of flexible work structures upon family child care arrangements among State employees.

C. Who Cares for the Children?

1. Enact legislation initiating a Child Care Sliding Fee Program for lower, middle-income families and appropriate \$2.25 million for the biennium to fund the program.
2. Amend the State Child Care Tax Credit by increasing the income limit for the full credit from \$12,000 to \$14,000.
3. Advocate increasing the Federal Child Care Tax Credit for lower and moderate income families.
4. Enact new legislation piloting a voluntary program for the regulation of one-family child day care services and appropriate funds for that purpose.

D. Work and Welfare

1. Allow those who are successfully working at a job training program, ie. the NON-WIN (voluntary program) to complete this program before having to register for the WIN (mandatory program).
2. Enact legislation to supplement Title XX funds earmarked for NON-WIN services with needed state monies: enact legislation that will insure information about NON-WIN services be automatically provided to those who are eligible.
3. Urge the government to stand neutral with regard to mandating work for those on AFDC programs.

4. Recommend that the program AFDC-UF (Unemployed Father) be changed to AFDC-UP (Unemployed Parent).
5. Recommend that medical assistance benefits either from federal sources (MA program) or from state sources (i.e. Minnesota Comprehensive Health Insurance Act) be extended for a six month period to those leaving AFDC; introduce a state-wide sliding fee for those leaving AFDC who need child care.
6. Recommend that the State study the costs of allowing persons on AFDC who are beginning to work a "transition period" in which such persons could work and receive their full grant.

E. Parenting: the Work of a Lifetime

Urge that a Generation Investment Bill be drafted modeled on the GI Bill which would extend the educational benefits offered in this Bill to a parent who has spent at least three consecutive, full-time years in child-rearing.

III. Education and the Family

A. Need for a Home and School Partnership

Urge the State Board of Education to work with school districts to lessen the degree of age segregation in the schools.

B. Early Childhood and Family Education

1. Enact legislation in the 1979 session to expand the Early Childhood and Family Education Programs from the present twenty-two sites to forty sites.
2. Suggest that National Institute of Education or other such groups select Minnesota as a national site for a longitudinal study on the cost effectiveness of Early Childhood and Family Education Programs.

C. Community Education

1. Support the concept of Community Education through legislative and executive efforts on local and state levels.
2. Support efforts to seek grants on the national level to study how educators might better understand the needs of children and families through the formation of National Family Institutes for educators.

D. Television and the Family

1. Encourage the State Department of Education to assist school districts to offer regular instruction about television and its multiple effects.
2. Encourage the State Department of Education to cooperate with all communications media to provide appropriate programming for children and families.

IV. Legal Issues and the Family

A. The Right to a Father

1. Pass a Uniform Parentage Act.
2. Urge the legislature to try to accommodate the balance of interests in as equitable a manner as possible with regard to the limitations regarding the number of years that an action can be brought to determine paternity.
3. Urge the legislature to allow the ninety day waiting period required to assure termination of parental rights be reduced or give the determination before the birth of the baby in those cases where the mother has decided beforehand to terminate her rights to the new-born child.

B. Marriage and Dissolution

1. Urge the legislature to consider positive incentives or education to help people from an early age to adulthood view marriage as a long-term commitment carrying with it mutual rights and responsibilities.
2. Recommend that the legislature mandate a suitable waiting period once dissolution proceedings have begun but before stipulations and the finalization of the divorce decree have become unalterable.
3. Support the present legislation regarding the Uniform Marriage and Divorce Act.

V. Foster Care and Adoption

A. Prevention of the Need for Foster Care

Support any legislative or administrative efforts to make the prevention of initial family separation a matter of first priority.

B. Drift in Long Term Placement

Endorse the legislation permitting the termination of parental rights if it can be proved that there is "neglect while in foster care."

C. Expanded Subsidized Adoption Program

Amend the Subsidized Adoption Statute (M.S. 393.07, subd.1a) to eliminate the financial disincentive to counties to use subsidized adoption.

VI. Family Violence

1. Make the issue of family violence a primary focus of concern for the Task Force on Families during the next six months.
2. Assist various state agencies to identify agency responsibilities with a view to implementing programs within their own departments to reduce the incidence of family violence.
3. Endorse legislation such as the "Order for Protection" Bill and child abuse legislation that would require counties to prepare detailed plans on the implementation of child abuse laws.
4. Provide a forum for grass roots participation in the shaping of public policy on family violence.
5. Integrate the information received by all such groups in a written Report that could be useful to the policy-makers at all levels of government.

VII. Further Areas to be Reviewed: Taxes and Housing Policies

A. Taxes

Allow a tax credit to parents whose elderly parents or disabled children are living with them. In the case of a disabled senior citizen living with their children, a double credit might be allowed.

Allow a one-time capital gains tax exemption on the selling of a home. The purpose would be to give a substantial break to people who are older and to give them some flexibility in their housing choices. The long-range hope is to free larger housing for the market without financially hurting their present owners.

VIII. Need for a Council on Children and Families

Enact legislation setting up a Council on Children and Families, whose primary purpose would be to clarify the responsibilities of the many state and local agencies involved in the provision or supervision of services to children and families, to resolve interagency conflicts in as efficient a manner as possible, and to work for the removal of any public policies on the state and local levels which might prevent the healthy development of Minnesota's children and families.

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