

Letter to the editor: 'Mitigate by all means appropriate unintended pregnancy'

Written by Gallupsun Staff

Friday, 01 February 2019 10:17

The Most Rev. James Wall, Bishop of the Diocese of Gallup wrote a letter to oppose repealing New Mexico's abortion law, which is at this time unenforceable because of the U. S. Supreme Court's decision in Roe v. Wade.

He states that abortion targets and victimizes a deeply vulnerable population – unborn children and future generations. In support of his position he states that NM is low in educational attainment, economic opportunity, and childhood health and high in poverty.

President Obama himself observed that children growing up without a father are more likely to live in poverty, more likely to drop out of school and more likely to wind up in prison. A married couple with children earns, on average, an income that more than triples the income of a household headed by a single mom. That fact isn't a license to stigmatize single moms, but it is a statistical truth.

According to the U. S. Census Bureau, New Mexico ranks 48th among states in the percentage of children who live in single-parent homes. That rate is 42 percent. Approximately 10% of New Mexico children have had a parent who has served time in jail or prison, placing our state at 47th

out of 50. According to a 2017 report by Grandfamilies, an organization dedicated to grandparents who are primary caregivers for their grandchildren, six percent of New Mexico children live without either biological parent, and 12.7 percent of children live in homes that are owned by grandparents or other relatives.

New Mexico has been first or second in the nation for the past 15 years in alcohol-related cirrhotic death, and New Mexico had the second-highest drug overdose mortality rate in the United States in 2014. Therefore, whether secondary to parental substance abuse, incarceration or estrangement, many of New Mexico's youth have lost their parents. New Mexico ranks 50th on property crime according to WalletHub.

New Mexico's Department of Children, Youth & Families Department, CYFD, has been overwhelmed with problem families. George David, former Director of Psychiatry for CYFD, himself a child and adolescent psychiatrist, states in a newspaper article "it was not uncommon for me to watch an abused child transition into state custody, only to soon graduate to the mental health system and then, eventually, when their behaviors became too extreme, to the

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delinquency system.”

He goes on, “[c]ases such as these are known as ‘million dollar children’ for the almost limitless resources they consume. We attend to the childcare tragedies and dangers of delinquency once they occur, but for the life of us we do not know how to get in front of them.”

Some of these children, grown up, are among those we see on the streets of Gallup, petty thieves, repeatedly convicted and released after minimal time served, alcoholics and drug addicts unable to beat their addictions. Deprived of an education or skills necessary to navigate a successful life, they are our poor discarded souls.

The New Mexico State Legislature is at this moment debating how much more to fund early childhood education and childcare to supplement the existing system. There is no amount of money that can get ahead of this problem as long as we ignore the cause – unintended pregnancy and unstable homes. Raising a child, especially in the first early years is a full time job.

Ask the mother of a two-year-old how much “free time” she enjoys. When she has little or no education and no husband she is left with minimum pay jobs and a constant need for some childcare.

The way to “get in front of them” is to mitigate by all means appropriate unintended pregnancy.

What do we know about abortion and crime? We have an excellent example from the above mentioned Roe v. Wade U. S. Supreme Court Decision which guaranteed a woman’s right to an abortion. Steven Levitt, an economist known for his work in the field of crime and currently a professor of Economics at the University of Chicago described the aftermath of the Roe v. Wade decision on crime in his 2005 book *Freakonomics*.

Professor Levitt, a true scientist, stating that he was not endorsing abortion or opposing abortion, but was simply reporting. And report he did. The large drop in crime in the early 1990’s he attributed to Roe v. Wade.

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In about 30 pages he points to example after example around the world that demonstrate abortion is associated with a reduction [not an elimination] in crime. His final statement in the book is worth repeating here: “What the link between abortion and crime does say is this: when the government gives a woman the opportunity to make her own decision about abortion, she generally does a good job of figuring out if she is in a position to raise the baby well. If she decides she can’t, she often chooses the abortion.”

The politically neutral Brookings Institution in a study later repeated by the conservative American Enterprise Institute found that young people can virtually assure they will avoid poverty by following three simple rules: get a high-school education, work full time and wait until age 21 to get married and have children. Based on the analysis, young adults who followed all three rules had a 72% chance of joining the middle class. Violate all three rules and their chances of being poor rose to 77%.

Reducing unintended pregnancy is one of the keys to a successful childhood transition to adulthood. “If we want to reduce poverty, one of the simplest, fastest and cheapest things we could do would be to make sure that as few people as possible become parents before they actually want to,” said Isabel Sawhill, an economist at the [Brookings Institution](#). She argues in her 2014 book,

[Generation Unbound: Drifting Into Sex and Parenthood Without Marriage](#), “that single parenthood is a principal driver of inequality and long-acting birth control is a powerful tool to prevent it.

In this light, we can get insight from the State of Colorado Department of Health’s recent success in this area. Over a five-year period they reduced both abortion and unwanted pregnancy among teenagers an amazing 50% by providing cost-free reversible birth control to all. The funds for the project came from a grant from a private foundation.

Colorado, with a population of 10 million, over the course of five years, greatly reduced unintended pregnancy and abortion.

From the Colorado Department of Public Health’s report, page viii,

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In 2008, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment [CDPHE] secured funding from a private donor to launch the Colorado Family Planning Initiative [CFPI], an expansion of the Family Planning Program that would provide training, operational support and low- or no-cost long-acting reversible contraceptives [LARCs] to low-income women statewide. LARC methods are defined as intrauterine devices [IUDs] and implants.

By the middle of 2015, the initiative provided LARCs to more than 36,000 women. Between 2009 and 2014, birth and abortion rates both declined by nearly 50 percent among teens aged 15-19 and by 20 percent among women aged 20-24. Public assistance costs associated with births that were averted among women aged 15-24 totaled between \$54.6 and \$60.6 million for four entitlement programs.

And from page ix,

With cost and access no longer an issue, the number of LARCs inserted nearly quadrupled in the first six years, and the percentage of LARC users in Title X clinics increased from 6.4 percent to 30.5 percent.

Here is the link to the Colorado Department of Health’s report:

https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/PSD_TitleX3_CFPI-Report.pdf

Colorado’s experience demonstrates that the \$27 million invested reduced costs in four entitlement programs by more than twice that amount, showing that these measures saved twice their cost in just four government programs. How much will be saved in years to come with fewer children needing the services of CYFD and the sheriff?

Combined with an emphasis on education in New Mexico we can look to a bright future. Singapore is the leading example of this. Five decades ago Singapore was so poor and hopeless that its per capita income was the same as Jamaica’s. Singapore now has the 9th largest per capita gross domestic product, right behind the United States which is 8th

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It's per capita income in 2017 was \$90,570, fifty percent higher than US per capita income at \$60,200. What a change in 50 years! And this change is largely due to Singapore's emphasis on education. Their 2-dollar bill has a picture of an instructor leading a class.

Below this picture is the single word “EDUCATION”. An Albuquerque Journal article [9/10/2009] quotes the National University of Singapore President as saying “Singapore has no natural resources, so we can't survive if we don't focus on our people's minds. New Mexico's leading natural resources, oil & gas highly variable as income sources and coming under increasing pressure due to the global warming. Time to invest in minds.

Most Rev. James Wall, Bishop, for your faithful perhaps abortion is not an appropriate option. But for the rest of society it is a necessary, though not a happy option. But so is reversible birth control and a greater emphasis on educational attainment for all our citizens.

Michael Daly,

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