



Our Kids At Risk: Attacks on the Family from the Religious Right

Behind 'family values': the threat to Texas families

The religious right has laid claim to a cluster of issues they term 'family values.' Its leaders promote a singular vision of family life--a two-parent, one-income, unbroken nuclear family-- and condemn policies that admit any other model as 'anti-family.' However, despite its much-touted concern for the family, the religious right pushes policy initiatives that would undermine the very institutions that support working families: public education, accessible health care, access to quality child care, Child Protective Services, and youth violence prevention programs.

Why is the far right's position on children's issues so important?

In Texas, a handful of organizations representing extremist points of view have had a vastly disproportionate effect on public policy. Laying claim to religious and moral high ground, religious right organizations have sought to defeat numerous pro-family initiatives. The power, real and perceived, of the religious right at the ballot box in Texas has given these groups tremendous influence over policy. The end result is full of irony: calling themselves 'pro-family', a few groups have erected a roadblock to policies that would benefit working families.

The religious right and low-income families

Because the policy agenda of the religious right seeks to dismantle many long-standing programs that serve the poor, it represents a particular threat to low-income communities. At risk are such programs as health insurance for low-income children, federal school lunches, early childhood education, school-based health programs, drug-abuse prevention efforts, child care funding, and full funding of public education.

In their own words

What follows is a compilation of research on the far right's positions on children's issues, including threats to public education, lack of affordable child care, barriers to access to health care for low-income children, and violence against children.

Threats to public education

The religious right has a long history of supporting policies that undermine public schools. Of late, their attacks on public schools have been three-fold: attempts to elect far right “stealth” candidates to local school boards, promoting private and religious school vouchers which would siphon money from our already under-funded public schools, and trying to dictate curriculum and textbook selection through an attempted takeover of the Texas State Board of Education. .

“I hope I live to see the day when...we won’t have any public schools. The Churches will have taken them over again and Christians will be running them. What a happy day that will be.”

-Jerry Falwell, America Can Be Saved

“There are 15,700 local school boards in this country. It is our intent to take them over, one by one. All we need is a majority...and then we will determine what is taught, we will determine who is hired and who is fired...We will be the ‘stealth’ candidates, and you must carry out our mission in such a way that the public won’t know what we’re about until we’ve won control.”

-Robert Simonds, Citizens for Excellence in Education, Dallas Morning News 5/26/94

Exodus 2000 “could seriously cripple the power secularism now holds over our culture by holding our children as near hostages in state schools.”

-Rev. Raymond Moore, Dallas Morning News 1/30/99

“Give us a few more years under the belt and we will learn how to replace many of the school board members. Give us more time to understand how the system works, and we’ll work the system even better than one could ever imagine.”

-Louis Sheldon, Traditional Values Coalition, CNN News 9/2/99

“The public school system is doing more harm now to the country than any single thing except perhaps the popular media.”

-Rev. Raymond Moore, Exodus 2000 Website

"As the church watches from the sidelines, the ungodly elects atheists and homosexuals to school boards and legislatures to enact policies and laws that destroy our Christian children and discriminate against Christian families."

-Robert Simonds, NACE President's Report, 3/1/91

“I think it’s important to take money out of the public school coffers.”

-Nina Shokraii, Heritage Foundation

“The future of America is not [shaped] by who sits in the Oval Office but by who sits in the principal’s office.”

-Christian Coalition’s Ralph Reed, Time Magazine 5/15/95

“It’s a waste of time trying to improve a government school system that is broken and hostile to conservative beliefs and values. Get the kids out as you would if the school was on fire. In a way it is, as it is burning the minds and souls of the next generation.”

-Cal Thomas "Red, White, and Views" a Christian radio program

"If you have kids in public school, you're a welfare king or a welfare queen."

-Marshall Fritz, Separation of School & State Alliance

Lack of affordable child care

Religious right groups like Phyllis Schlafley's Eagle Forum and Concerned Women for America organize their grassroots activists to strenuously oppose any funding or incentives for childcare, claiming that so-called "traditional families" would be threatened and penalized by such proposals.

"Universal child day care: the latest threat to the family."

-Title of a Family Research Council article written by Robin DeJarnette

"A new federal child care initiative will only force more parents into the paid labor force to make ends meet."

-Texas Eagle Forum (TORCH Nov. 1997)

"First to go should be the 'LYFE' center, as high schools call their day care centers...the centers have put their official stamp of approval on teen childbearing...."

- "The Real Welfare Problem" from Focus on the Family, Citizen, 4/98

"[W]hat [a federal day care subsidy] means is more pressure on moms and dads to place their little ones in cold, institutional day care -- sooner and for longer periods. More and more mothers and fathers will be forced to work longer days and longer weeks to pay for this."

-Gary Bauer on the FRC Radio program Washington Watch, 1/9/98

"Institutional care is harmful to children."

-Robert Rector, Heritage Foundation Welfare Policy Analyst

"Hillary's Brave New World" from the Focus on the Family Web site--first appeared in FOF "Citizen" magazine in 1998

"If the Clinton White House has its way, we will move rapidly toward increased governmental intervention in rearing children, dramatically weakening family bonds. We are already seeing the societal fallout from decades of emotional neglect: a bumper crop of kids without conscience and an upsurge in juvenile crime and violence. And the worst is yet to come. As today's young children reach the ages of 14 to 17 in 2005, we will usher the most heavily-armed generation in American history into adolescence."

-Brenda Hunter writing for Focus on the Family Magazine, 1998

"The feminist ideology pushes for the elimination of motherhood as a 'role' so that child care will become a government responsibility and women can achieve full equality with men."

-Phyllis Schlafly, "The Politics of Daycare"

"We are altering the cultural fabric in this society with the mass exodus of children into day care. Children who are growing up without a close maternal bond will someday engage in fewer marriages and incur more divorces."

-Byrna Siegel, a psychologist at Stanford University in an article for Concerned Women For America Website, 5/20/98

"With the money, the government implements programs to control the family unit-such as child care." Referring to child care legislation, "Any legislative policy undermining the God-ordained relationships within the family is detrimental."

-*Concerned Women Of America (Press Release May 20, 1998)*

"If the Clinton White House has its way, we will move rapidly toward increased governmental intervention in rearing children, dramatically weakening family bonds."

-*Brenda Hunter, Focus on the Family*

"With its ever-increasing role in providing child care, government has weakened the parent-child bond and promoted the idea that the love and nurture of a family can be replicated by a paid attendant."

-*"Family Breakdown Worsening" by Leslie Carbone, Family Research Council*

Barriers to access to health care for low-income children

The religious right has been one of the few constituencies in Texas opposed to CHIP and its expansion. Claiming that the healthcare crisis for our children is non-existent and that health insurance is a government scheme to track citizens, they have actively opposed a range of programs from easing enrollment for Medicaid to school health clinics to immunization programs. The far right's opposition to such programs has had a major impact on state policy for the healthcare needs of children.

CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Plan)

"We do not have a children's health care crisis and the Texas Healthy Kids Corporation (THKC) does not provide health care-it is simply a plan to track Americans' health from birth to death by dictating health insurance coverage.

-*Texas Eagle Forum, Alert 2/21/99*

CHIP is... a hastily contrived and ill-considered solution to a non-existent crisis.

-*Texas Eagle Forum (TORCH May, 1999)*

Such legislated welfare programs as CHIP are the products of misguided good intentions, temporary prosperity, and inexcusable ignorance.

-*Texas Eagle Forum (TORCH May, 1999)*

"Now illegal aliens will be able to purchase cheap insurance for their children... This is an incentive for them to come here."

-*Cathie Adams, Texas Eagle Forum*

"The federal Children's Health Insurance Plan (CHIP) is the first installment of the Clinton socialized medicine scheme."

-Texas Eagle Forum 2000 Candidate Questionnaire

"The Texas Health Kids Corporation, the Texas version of CHIP, should be repealed."

-Texas Eagle Forum 2000 Candidate Questionnaire

School Based Health Clinics

"The concept of school clinics subverts the authority of parents. Parents drop off their kids thinking they are getting an education, not government interference in their family health decisions for their children."

-Free Market Foundation (Faxed Activist Alert 6/11/99)

"The main problem is that our already overburdened schools should be allowed to focus on educating our children-not medicating them."

-Texas Christian Coalition (Press Release 1/4/99)

"This bill would create a socialized medical system in the heart of each community on the school campuses funded by taxpayers through schemes including Medicaid."

-Texas Eagle Forum, Alert 3/17/99

"I oppose diverting the mission of public education by making schools one-stop shopping centers for health and welfare services."

-The Texas Eagle Forum 2000 Candidate Questionnaire

Immunizations

"Allowing the government to collect and store personal medical records, and to track us as we move about in our daily lives puts awesome power in the hands of government bureaucrats."

-Texas Eagle Forum (TORCH Sept. 1998)

"The use of government computer surveillance to force private citizens to comply with government determined medical procedures is a threat to the core of our freedom."

-Parents Requesting Open Vaccine Education (PROVE) excerpted from the Texas Eagle Forum's website

"Texas Department of Health's goals were to undermine parental rights and give themselves control of our children's confidential medical records."

- Parents Requesting Open Vaccine Education (PROVE) excerpted from the Texas Eagle Forum's website

"We're worried the government wants to keep medical records on every man, woman and child and we'll have no right to privacy."

*-Nancy Bloomer, executive director of the ID Christian Coalition, explaining the group's opposition to immunization programs
New York Times, 3/7/99*

Violence Against Children

School violence

In the wake of horrific and tragic episodes of school violence, the radical religious right capitalized on instances of school shootings to push for their extremist political ideology.

“On April 20, the cumulative effect of therapeutic/socialization-style education (outcome based education) hit a critical mass. Parents of Littleton, Colorado got a good jolt of the “mental hygiene” approach to schooling up close and personal.”

-From “Children of the Therapeutic Society” by B.K. Eakman, Texas Eagle Forum (TORCH, Summer 1999)

"We have sterilized and contracepted our families down to sizes so small that the children we do have are so spoiled with material things that they come to equate the receiving of the material with love...our school systems teach the children that they are nothing but glorified apes who are evolutionized out of some primordial soup of mud."

-Rep. Tom Delay, on the causes of the Columbine tragedy, speaking on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, June 15, 1999

“School violence is the new ‘crisis’ shamefully used by big government to increase control over the lives of our children and to promote the ‘medicalization of the schools.’”

-Carolee Adams, “Education Reporter” Eagle Forum Website

“Liberals always seem to blame somebody else or blame some inanimate object, like guns, for the failure of their policies. They don’t want to face the music about what’s going on in America-the lack of religion in our schools and in our families.”

-Rep. Tom DeLay, on Pat Robertson’s radio show “Listen America” 6/25/99

After a story of school violence, Pat Robertson said the following: “But we’ve got to do something to go back to the moral standards of America. And gun control isn’t gonna do it as there are millions and millions of guns out there.”

-Pat Robertson remarks on the 700 Club, 6/23/99

Child Abuse

The misleading ‘parental rights’ initiative touted by religious right leaders would jeopardize the ability of child protection agencies to act effectively in cases of child abuse and neglect by making it harder to intercede on behalf of an abused child. Through the astute use of both the term ‘parental rights’ with its positive connotations and the legislative tactic of attaching ‘parental rights’ measures as amendments to a wide variety of legislation, the far right has frequently disguised parental rights initiatives and the dangers they pose to children.

"[P]erhaps the biggest threat to parental rights [is] the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.' "

*-Mike Farris, president of the Home School Legal Defense Association,
Washington Times, 11/30/99*

“A steady drumbeat of Child Protective Services tragedies reveals an increasing nonchalance about the sanctity of the family unit on the part of government social workers who take children from their homes on little more than a rumor.”

*-From “Parental Rights: Whose Children Are They?” by Cathleen Cleaver,
Family Research Council*

“That our child protective system need improvement is apparent, but no case of under-enforcement can support a blanket sanction of over-enforcement so obtrusive as to be self-defeating.”

*-From “Parental Rights: Whose Children Are They?” by Cathleen Cleaver,
Family Research Council*

“One scenario provides a negative justification for expanded societal action-to prevent child neglect and abuse-and the other provides justification-to promote greater parental involvement in their children’s education. Either way, the evolving philosophy views the state (and its agents, the schools) as the supervisor of the family, rather than its servant.”

-From Big Brother is Watching: Parent Licensing, Parent Training, and Parent-Teacher Compacts by Charmaine Crouse Yoest, Family Research Council

The following organizations have recognized the dangers to children inherent in ‘parental rights’ legislation and have made their opposition public:

American Academy of Pediatrics, American Counseling Association, American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, Child Welfare League of America, National Association of School Psychologists, National Association of Social Workers, National Black Women’s Health Project, National Council of Churches of Christ, National Council of Jewish Women, Anti-Defamation League, Presbyterian Church USA Washington Office, People for the American Way Education Fund, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, National Education Association, American Association of School Administrators, The National PTA, National SAFEKIDS Campaign, Planned Parenthood Federation of American, American Civil Liberties Union, and the National School Boards Association.

“This bill will create health risks to children. It would overturn many state and local laws that protect children from abuse and provide them with needed medical care. Health care workers might be afraid to treat or report an abused child for fear of being sued for “interfering.”

-Planned Parenthood Federation of America

The National Child Abuse Coalition believes that the “threat of lawsuits would deter reporting of suspected child maltreatment and wreak havoc with local efforts to protect children.”

-People for the American Way