Why family values count in this year's election

By JOHN M. HAAS

"Family values" has emerged as one of the most confusing themes in the current election campaign. Apparently it has not played well in Peoria. A recent CNN/Time poll showed that only 5 percent of the electorate considered it a significant campaign issue. The overwhelming preoccupation of average Americans is the economy. After all, if the economy is not healthy, families will not be able to live out their own values, whatever they perceive them to be.

In most people's minds family values and the economy have little to do with one another. "Values" have been banished to the realm of privacy and individual preferences. Yet family values invariably touch upon sex, and if there is one thing sex is not, it is a private matter.

The sex act by its very nature is profoundly social. It invariably (or at least very often) involves someone else. And most significantly, it is the act by which any given society grows and replenishes itself and by which the species is perpetuated.

Why, after all, does the state concern itself with the sexual acts of private individuals? Why is it that government is against the random copulation of its citizens? The answer is simple. The state has always regulated and licensed such activity because the very survival of the society for which government is responsible depends upon it. Governments concern themselves with sexual activity because it results in children. If families are not in place to care for, nurture and educate these children, they become the responsibility of the state.

In what has become almost a universal societal act of denial, people seem to think that sex is somehow divorced from children. However, the billions spent over the years by Planned Parenthood bear testimony to the truth of the matter. Sex is inextricably bound up with having babies. The 1.5 million abortions performed in the United States every year is tragic testimony to this.

The statistic that 27 percent of the children born in the United States this year will be born out of wedlock is further proof of the validity of what ought to be the common-sense insight that sex is for babies.

All of this has profound social — and, yes, economic — consequences. The federal program of Aid to Families with Dependent Children expends over $8 billion a year helping where families have failed or where there were no families to provide support. Much of this problem is the result of the "sexual revolution" and the discarding of family values.

The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta is reporting the highest incidence of sexually transmitted diseases ever. Notwithstanding antibiotics, sex education and the free distribution of condoms in our public schools, gonorrhea is at its highest levels since the end of World War II. Sexually transmitted diseases has resulted in a tremendous strain upon our public health resources.

It is reported that $10.3 billion a year is spent for the care of persons with AIDS. This does not take into account the vast sums spent trying to find a cure or a prevention.

Without suggesting in any way that we back away from our moral obligation to help those with this illness, it must be noted that the vast majority of persons with AIDS contracted the disease by engaging in behaviors which are clearly not consonant with "family values." Many of the burdens resulting from individuals having chosen to place themselves at risk are now having to be born by society at large.

Governments have always taken into account the fact that married couples assume greater burdens for the social good in the rearing of children. After all, children are the future citizens, producers and consumers in society. Since parents make sacrifices to cover the costs of feeding, clothing, housing, and educating their offspring for the good of society, the state provides tax exemptions and other assistance.

Now that people generally view sexual activity as divorced from the task of child-bearing and rearing, none of these "special" arrangements seem to make any sense. Consequently gay and other co-habitating individuals are demanding their own "spousal" privileges — but without assuming the corresponding social obligation of child-bearing and rearing. As a result we are now faced with the threat of yet more government entitlements to drain our national resources.

Families simply make economic sense. Professor Thomas Smith of the University of South Carolina has found from his research that "adolescents whose parents have separated or divorced are more susceptible than others to peer pressures . . . and actually engage in more deviant behavior than others." The deviant behavior to which Smith refers are drug use and sexual promiscuity — both of which result in high social cost.

The traditional family tends to higher productivity because of the natural division of labor and the demands placed on it. A study was done at an institute at the University of Wisconsin which found that married men work between two-and-one-third and four times harder than married women and twice as hard as women who were heads of families. It also found that husbands worked 50 percent harder than bachelors of comparable age, education and skills.

Recent census data also show that families make sound economic sense. The census found that the income gap between the white and black populations widened generally between 1967 and 1990. However, the income gap between white and black *families* actually narrowed considerably in the same period. In 1967 the black family earned an average $72 against $100 for whites. In 1990 it was $85 against $100. The gap is being narrowed, and it is being narrowed by black *families*.

The voters are right to be preoccupied with the economy. But they should also have enough common sense to see that family values make tremendous economic sense.

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The 'traditional' family is largely a fictional ideal

By ANN ROSEN SPECTOR

As a result of the precedent-setting case of a child "divorcing" his parents, Gregory Kingsley is now Shawn Russ.

While his lawyers assert that this was an indictment of the foster care system in the United States, the Gregory K. affair really highlights the almost complete absence of a comprehensive, logical and pragmatic national family policy. *Policy*, not rhetoric about family values.

A policy that assesses what families need to not only survive but to thrive. A policy that is not a series of political Band-Aids but effective comprehensive interventions that would prevent and heal family ills.

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Some critics of the Gregory K. case argue that the biological act of reproduction is preparation for effective parenting. They believe that simply by producing children, parents will love and take care of them.

These idealists have neither studied family history nor read historical novels (Does Charles Dickens evoke images of pampered cherubs?) They ignore current social science and demographic literature about the status of children today, *real* children, not Gerber babies.

Until comparatively recently, to be married meant for women to continually bear children. From menarche to menopause, the only respite from parturition was the occasional and fortunate delays caused by breast-feeding, absence or death of a spouse/sexual partner or the ever-popular maternal mortality.

The cycle: sex, pregnancy, birth, sex, pregnancy, birth *ad infinitum*.

Population control? Miscarriages, stillbirths, infanticide.

A common practice spanning from classical Greece to Victorian England to contemporary China, infanticide was not considered a crime. By not entering the family circle or being initiated through religious ceremonies, then the child didn't exist as a person. No person, no crime.

No bonding, either.

The idea of childhood as a special period and of the child as a precious individual didn't emerge until only a few hundred years ago.

In genealogies, diaries and personal papers of the aristocracy, no entries were made of children who didn't survive the first year. They didn't count.

The lack of individual identity attached to each child was also underscored by the naming practices; if a child died, the next child would almost always be given the *exact same name*.

If a son were born and appeared frail, the next one would be given the same name. Just in case. The heir and the spare. That must have made the first son feel secure about his value to the family.

This practice didn't end until the *early* 1900s.

Subsequent changes that occurred in recording births and deaths illustrate fundamental changes in the ways parents began to view their progeny. It set the stage, in the context of lower infant mortality and longer life expectancy, for parent-child affectional ties to develop.

Remember, prominent child-raising theories had commanded parents to mold their children by breaking their inherently evil spirit. Affection and fondness were to be eschewed in favor of control and obedience. These were some of the benefits one had in an intact family.

There weren't many families where parents lived to see their children reach adulthood. Due to all-around high mortality rates, parent-child bonds were, at best, tenuous. Mostly, there were a lot of orphans and remarriage was inevitable.

And, if the parents and children all survived, what would a family do with all those mouths to feed?

Giving or selling children to the church was a popular option. Sending them to workhouses or orphanages and abandonment were other forms of family management.

Children of earlier times didn't need to divorce their parents anymore than spouses did. One could sever familial ties because they were attenuated to begin with and there was room, both geographically and sociologically, to just leave.

Emancipated children were valued by both agrarian and industrial concerns which needed workers. Before legislation prohibited it, children were welcomed into the ranks of the employed where they were exploited and underpaid.

Children who were abused by their parents had no recourse under the law. The Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) was organized well before any Child Protective Services. Indeed, the first case of child abuse was prosecuted in New York City under cruelty-to-animals laws. Children, as parental chattel, had no rights.

So, what's the point of these history lessons?

That the days of the good old traditional family are largely a fiction.

That the idea of loving children upon birth is a relatively recent concept. It is not universal and it is not instinctual. It is learned behavior within a cultural context. Learned not by lecturing but by modeling and experiencing it.

If we are loved, respected, valued and cared for as children, we are equipped to replicate these experiences with our own children.

If we've not had optimum parenting, or even good-enough parenting, the kind of parenting that elevates the "best interests of the child" above what is expedient for the parent, we can sometimes compensate and learn how to be a quality parent.

The government can certainly help here by a comprehensive family policy that enhances the parent/child relationship. This would include mandating parental leave to keep a mother or father in the home during certain cycles. And include revising the foster care system so that children are not removed from parents. Any number of demonstration projects have shown that when mothers and fathers get help learning to be better parents, families thrive.

Instead of decrying the Gregory K. case as a blow for families, let us hail it not only as a victory for one little boy who will be loved now but also as a signal for the government to establish a long-range family policy.

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