

The Ignored Issue That Can Get Progressives Elected

By Riane Eisler, AlterNet

Posted on September 13, 2007, Printed on September 13, 2007

<http://www.alternet.org/story/60596/>

A recent poll found that the biggest issue for voters as the 2008 election approaches is not the Iraq war. It's an issue that leaders have not been focusing on: the well-being of America's children.

The poll asked conservatives and liberals, whites and blacks, men and women, Christians and non-Christians which of 11 changes were "absolutely necessary" for the United States to address within the next 10 years. The 11 ranged from national security and environmental protection to the state of marriage and families and the spiritual state of the country. But the issues that emerged as the frontrunners were "the overall care and resources devoted to children" and "the quality of a public school education." That was the response by 82 percent of the adults surveyed. What's even more interesting is that this poll was conducted by the Barna Group, a Christian polling organization.

Of course, the religious right has made a great deal of "family values" over the last decades. But the "overall care and resources devoted to children" was hardly what they focused on. On the contrary, many of their policies have been terribly detrimental to children.

While the Republican Party calls itself the party of "family values," for the past six years, a Republican administration has consistently opposed and cut programs that help America's children. The administration has opposed school lunches, after-school programs for families of working mothers, preschool programs, and college loans. Most recently, President Bush even threatened to veto an expansion of health insurance for the millions of American children who lack adequate health care: the SCHIP program.

This failure by the current Administration and its congressional allies to care for America's children gives progressives the opportunity to reclaim an area they've tragically neglected. It offers the opportunity to introduce a progressive family policy agenda.

This progressive family policy agenda should include:

- Policies that recognize the right of children to have a fair opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive, including the right to shelter, nutrition, education, and health care, freedom from violence, and a clean environment.
- Support for parents through paid parental leave, high-quality childcare, caregiver tax credits and stipends, high quality preschool education for all children, and education for healthy, nonviolent family relations and parenting for both boys and girls -- as offered by Nordic nations, which have much lower crime rates,

prosperous economies, longer life spans, and regularly rate at the top of the U.N. Human Development reports.

- Taking a stand against corporate practices that harm children -- from toxic dumps and other forms of environmental pollution to marketing unhealthy food and drinks -- and recognizing that we must address global warming and other environmental problems that threaten our children's future.
- Making ending family violence and other forms of intimate violence a top religious and secular issue.
- Making ratification of United Nations conventions to protect women and children a top congressional priority.

To achieve these goals, progressives must reclaim and redefine "family values." This is essential not only to win the 2008 elections, but it is essential in the long term, if our nation is to resume the movement toward equality, freedom and democracy.

Over the last decades, regressives have successfully pushed our culture back by insisting on a "traditional" male-headed, authoritarian family. In 1992, when Americans were asked if the "father of the family is master of the house," 42 percent said yes. By 2004 the percentage had risen to 52 percent. Not coincidentally, during these same years people increasingly voted for "strong" leaders who brook no dissent and use force to impose their will. In short, the push back to the kind of family that prepares people to defer to such leaders has been extremely successful politically.

The task at hand for progressives is to invite responsible policy makers, leaders, the media and the general public to look with fresh eyes at the meaning of the terms "family," "values" and "morality." We must redefine these terms in ways based on partnership, mutual respect and caring rather than domination, top-down control and coercion.

This is what people can -- and will -- respond to if we're clear and passionate in our message and propose a truly compassionate family agenda that will ensure our national resources are really devoted to the care of America's children.

In the United States, the cry of socialism is often raised when people propose high quality child care, single-payer healthcare and other pro-family policies. But Sweden, Norway, Finland and other nations with pro-family policies are not socialist countries. They are nations where government priorities are not for funding prisons, weapons and wars, but for funding the most essential human work: caring for people, beginning in childhood. Indeed, Nordic writers often refer to their nations not as socialist or even welfare states, but as caring societies.

We too must recognize that children are the real wealth of our nation. Let's let political candidates know this -- and see to it that government policies really value and support families. This is what people want, and it's our job to show that it can and must be done.

Riane Eisler is best known for her international bestseller The Chalice and The Blade and her just published The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics. She is

president of the Center for Partnership Studies and co-founder of the Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence. For more information, see www.rianeeisler.com and www.partnershipway.org.

© 2007 Independent Media Institute. All rights reserved.
View this story online at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/60596/>