

Dr. Stephen F. Schneck  
Director, Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies  
Catholic University of America  
620 Michigan Ave., NE  
Washington, DC 20064

Dr. Henry Potrykus  
Dr. Patrick Fagan  
Family Research Council  
801 G St, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20001  
202-624-3023

September 25, 2012

Dear Dr. Schneck,

At the Democratic National Convention you publicly stated that welfare programs would do more to reduce abortion than legislative measures, claiming that “The most powerful abortifacient in America is poverty.” As a member of the academic community, you should be able to provide factual evidence as the basis for your assertion. We submit that a fair reading of the available scientific literature does not support your statement.

The best available estimates of demand for abortions indicate that there is *no* relationship between AFDC benefits and abortion rates. Moreover, there is a preponderance of evidence indicating that abortion rates may actually *increase* with income. Welfare initiatives that effectively raise the incomes of the poor may *increase* the number of abortions, not decrease them as you claim.

We present the following evidence from the literature:

- “Welfare payments to teenage mothers are negatively associated with both black and white teenage birthrates, and higher maximum payments are associated with relatively high abortion levels.”<sup>1</sup>
- “Higher maximum AFDC payments to two persons with no other income (the likely financial position of a teenager having her first child) are significantly associated with higher abortion rates and ratios for all groups.”<sup>2</sup>
- “Neither the gender-specific economic variables, AFDC benefits nor Medicaid coverage has a significant effect on the abortion rate.”<sup>3</sup>
- “For abortion outcomes, the [coefficients on unemployment, wages, and income] are ... sensitive to the particular measures employed and no consistent pattern appears.”<sup>4</sup>
- “The AFDC results suggest that the effects of welfare on reproductive behavior have been greatly exaggerated by some in the current policy debate.”<sup>5</sup>
- Blank et al. (1996) find that increasing AFDC benefit levels has no effect on abortion rates.<sup>6</sup>
- “Changes in AFDC benefits have no measurable impact on abortion rates over time...”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Singh, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> Singh, p. 216.

<sup>3</sup> Matthews et al., p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> Matthews et al., p. 58.

<sup>5</sup> Matthews et al., p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> Blank et al, Table 1, p. 528. Coefficients for log (AFDC maximum benefit levels) are either positive or not statistically significant.

- “[V]ariations in welfare benefit levels and the incremental benefit have no statistically significant impacts on the subsequent childbearing decisions of young mothers in general, nor on the subsequent childbearing decisions of women who received welfare in particular.”<sup>8</sup>
- “Neither variation in the baseline generosity of AFDC plus Food Stamps nor in the incremental benefit for having an additional child significantly affect the subsequent decisions of young mothers who received AFDC to support their first children.”<sup>9</sup>
- “This finding is consistent with a situation in which AFDC affects the marriage choice, but not the overall rate of [post-pregnancy] teenage childbearing [brought to term].”<sup>10</sup>
- Blank et al. find a positive and statistically significant relationship between income and abortion rates.<sup>11</sup>
- Matthews et al. find a positive and statistically significant relationship between income and abortion rates.<sup>12</sup>
- Haas-Wilson (1996) finds a positive and statistically significant relationship between income and abortion rates.<sup>13</sup>
- “A 1 percent increase in per capita income results in a 1.35 to 2.07 increase in minors’ demand for abortions.”<sup>14</sup>
- Camasso (2004) states denial of cash benefits “does not exert an impact on any of the fertility behaviors [including abortion]” for a “full sample” experimental group of seven NJ counties.<sup>15</sup>

We point out that many of the quotes here are taken from articles in *Family Planning Perspectives* published by the Guttmacher Institute long before it disassociated itself from Planned Parenthood.

Given your position as Director of the Institute for Policy Research & Catholic Studies, your claims give the impression that they are founded in sound, fact-based analysis and represent a consensus view of the research community. In fact, this is exactly what is claimed by Catholics for Obama-Biden on their website, an organization with which you are publicly associated.<sup>16</sup> We cannot see how your claims can be based in such analysis.

A reasonable basis for your statement would consist of (1) a reasonable estimate of demand for abortion using appropriate instruments and published in a peer-reviewed journal, and (2) estimates of the effect of income on abortions demanded, with a direction (decrease) and magnitude determined to

---

<sup>7</sup> Blank, et al., p. 531.

<sup>8</sup> Acs, p. 898.

<sup>9</sup> Acs, p. 905-906.

<sup>10</sup> Lundberg and Plotnick, p. 251.

<sup>11</sup> This coefficient is statistically significant and positive under nearly every specification. See p. 529.

<sup>12</sup> Matthews et al., Table 4, p. 58.

<sup>13</sup> Haas-Wilson, Table 6, p. 152.

<sup>14</sup> Haas-Wilson, p. 151.

<sup>15</sup> Camasso, p. 462. This result holds for the less educated, minority-concentrated population of “ongoing cases.” For the higher-educated, more white population of “new case women” there is an increase of abortions when they are denied AFDC cash benefits.

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.democratsforlife.org/> and <http://www.catholicdemocrats.org/cfo/abortion.php>. Retrieved 9/11/2012.

indicate a significant reduction in abortion through an increase in income through, say, poverty programs.

Please provide an analytic grounding for your assertion. If you are unwilling to do so, we ask you to publicly retract your statement.

Sincerely,

Dr. Henry Potrykus, Senior Fellow, Marriage and Religion Research Institute, Family Research Council  
Dr. Patrick Fagan, Senior Fellow and Director, Marriage and Religion Research Institute, Family Research Council

CC:

John Garvey, President, Catholic University of America

Dr. James F. Brennan, Provost, Catholic University of America

Dr. L.R. Poos, Dean, Arts and Sciences, Catholic University of America

Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Catholic University of America

Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire, Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, United States Council of Catholic Bishops

Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities

## References

Acs, Gregory, "The Impact of Welfare on Young Mothers' Subsequent Childbearing Decisions," *The Journal of Human Resources* 31(4): 898-915 (Autumn 1996) (64 citations).

Blank, R.M., C.C. George, and R.A. London, "State Abortion Rates: The Impact of Policies, Providers, Politics, Demographics and Economic Environment," *Journal of Health Economics* 15: 513-553, (1996) (109 citations).

Camasso, Michael, "Isolating the Family Cap Effect on Fertility Behavior: Evidence from New Jersey's Family Development Program Experiment," *Contemporary Economic Policy* 22(4): 453-467 (2004) (12 citations).

Haas-Wilson, Deborah, "The Impact of State Abortion Restrictions on Minors' Demand for Abortions," *Journal of Human Resources* 31(1): 140-158 (Winter 1996) (94 citations).

Lundberg, Shelly, and Robert D. Plotnick, "Effects of State Welfare, Abortion and Family Planning Policies on Premarital Childbearing Among White Adolescents," *Family Planning Perspectives* 22(6): 246-251 & 275 (Nov-Dec 1990) (107 citations).

Matthews, Stephen, David Ribar, and Mark Wilhelm, "The Effects of Economic Conditions and Access to Reproductive Health Services On State Abortion Rates and Birthrates," *Family Planning Perspectives* 29(2): 52-60 (Mar-Apr 1997) (107 citations).

Singh, Susheela, "Adolescent Pregnancy in the United States: An Interstate Analysis," *Family Planning Perspectives* 18(5): 210 – 220 (Sep – Oct 1986) (77 citations).