

## Mother Nurture

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# The Most Important Thing

The intense focus on politics this season prompts us to ask a simple question:

*What would be best for the children?*

Can you imagine what daily life would be like if our local, state, and federal governments made the needs of children the overriding determinant of their policies?

At the most basic level, about one child in five nationwide is living below the poverty line. And that line is set very, very low. If you add the working poor that are above the poverty line but who still can't pay for basic needs like health insurance, about 25% of our children in America are growing up in highly stressful, often desperate circumstances. If that appalling fact actually mattered to our policymakers, you'd see a major investment in job training for parents and in education and health care for children.

Or consider the sweeping commercialization of childhood, with studies showing that the average child over 6 sees thousands of TV ads each year, designed by some of the best minds of our generation to be diabolically effective in stimulating cravings for all kinds of gizmos they don't really need. If we actually put the vulnerable minds of our children ahead of profits for TV networks and giant corporations, ads would be restricted, and kids would spend more time being creative and relational rather than consuming video games and silly toys.

Or what about the stress and go-go pace experienced by most kids' parents these days, working in "downsized" corporations, usually needing two incomes to make ends meet, often afraid of their jobs getting "exported" overseas. We live in a culture that worships work, in which Americans work longer hours each year than ANY other developed nation (including Japan, which is saying something). Contrast this with the standard throughout Europe that most businesses shut down for an hour or two around lunchtime - required by law in many cases - so that their workers can go home to be with their families.

Or let's look a little bit downstream, to the world our precious children will inherit in just a few years. It's not playing Chicken Little to name some absolute facts:

- Their parents are already using about 20% of their annual check to the IRS to pay for interest charges on the national debt, now over \$6 TRILLION (mostly added from 1980 onwards) and currently growing at about \$400 billion a year. Can you imagine if 20% of your household budget had to be spent on interest charges (and not a penny for principal) on your credit cards . . . and if that percentage were growing, not shrinking . . .

and if those debts were going to be forced onto your children as soon as they became adults . . . ?

- A large fraction of the world's people are already intensely hostile toward America - mainly due to the everyday effects in their lives or those they care about of being on the receiving end of US foreign policy - and that number is growing every day. In an increasingly global economy - and frankly, with increasingly easy access to very scary weapons - our kids will be unable to avoid the effects of the antagonisms their parents' leaders have created.
- Global warming due to human causes is an established fact, and it is accelerating. Our children will inherit a planet in just five years, let alone thirty years out when they are about our own age, that is much drier and hotter than it is today, with huge and obvious effects on crops, refugees, starvation, and wars for scarce resources.

If policymakers acted as stewards of the sacred responsibility each generation has for the one to come - whether or not they have children themselves - we'd hand our children a world that is better, not widely worse, than the one we were handed ourselves when we became grown-ups.

There are all these single-issue groups - like AARP, the NRA, labor unions, etc. - but there's no effective, unified political voice for children. It's time to listen to their imagined voices, to what they would tell us if they knew what we knew, to their completely understandable and wholesome yearnings for a country where there is really time for relationships, where no child goes hungry, where government resources can be devoted to human needs rather than paying interest to foreign bankers, where it's safe to carry an American passport throughout the world, where cool rains fall as much as ever, and where their parents' lives are not shadowed by nagging apprehension and unease.

We wish for that sort of country, for that sort of world, with every bit of our hearts. And we wish you the very best, you the parents who are doing everything you can yourselves to cherish your children and make your neighborhood, your country, your world a better place.

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