

Government: A Child's Friend or Foe?

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Twenty-five years ago, Hillary Clinton wrote a book about children entitled *It Takes a Village*. An oft quoted passage couples government and the common good:

Let us admit that some government programs and personnel are efficient and effective, and others are not. Let us acknowledge that when it comes to the treatment of children, some individuals are evil, neglectful, or incompetent, but others are trying to do the best they can against daunting odds and deserve not our contempt but the help only we—through our government—can provide. Let us stop stereotyping government and individuals as absolute villains or absolute saviors, and recognize that each must be part of the solution. Let us use government, as we have in the past, to further the common good.

The common good is a fair measure to judge the efforts of individuals and governments, yet recent actions by California legislators and government officials on behalf of the children are a far cry from meeting such a standard. Consider three examples.

Californians have recently emerged from some of the most draconian policies restricting personal liberties, ostensibly enacted to protect the citizenry from the corona virus pandemic. Medical opinions vary on the necessity and effectiveness of the restrictions, but the impact on children is clear on two fronts: mental health and education.

In a recent presentation to *Just the News*, Jeanne Noble, director of COVID response in the UCSF emergency department included the following data: suicides in the Golden State last year jumped by 24% for Californians under 18, children requiring emergency mental health services jumped last year in Children's Hospital of Oakland, and children's hospitalizations for eating disorders more than doubled at UCSF Children's Hospital. Noble also observed that the kids' interpersonal skills have "atrophied" over 18 months in "cloistered" communities. She included comments from a Texas summer camp director: "the shy children are more shy, the anxious kids more anxious, the angry ones are more angry."

A second example is the transition from children in the classroom to at home learning in front of a computer screen has diminished the academic performance of students and prevented them from participating in extracurricular activities that enhance learning and character. The full story of how much student learning has suffered will emerge over time, but a recent survey of parents by the Public Policy Institute of California reported that 83 percent of public-school parents think their children's education has been compromised in the past year – 60 percent said their children have fallen behind by "a lot" while the other 23 percent reported in at "a little." PPIC president and CEO Mark Baldassare added "Californians overwhelmingly believe that children have fallen behind academically during the pandemic and that students in lower-income areas and English language learners have been most at risk."

The third example strikes directly at the parent-child relationship. AB 1184, introduced in the California Legislature earlier this year and currently being debated by Senate Committees, amends confidentiality rules related to medical information. The Legislative Counsel's Digest includes this description: "The bill would require the health care service plan or health insurer to direct all communications regarding a protected individual's receipt of sensitive services directly to the protected individual, and would prohibit the disclosure of that information to the policyholder, primary subscriber, or any plan enrollees without the authorization of the protected individual, as provided." The California Family Council provides greater insight on the intent of AB 1184: "to force insurance companies to hide from parents 'sensitive' medical procedures given to their adult and minor children. These 'sensitive' services include abortions, sexual assault treatment, drug abuse and mental health treatment, cross-sex hormones, puberty blockers, and sex-change operations."

Returning to Mrs. Clinton's book, the Amazon 2006 review reads: "As relevant as ever, this [tenth] anniversary edition makes it abundantly clear that the choices we make today about how we raise our children and how we support families will determine how our nation will face the challenges of this century." California officials and legislature are undermining and harming children by their choices of policies and legislation as shown in the three examples. They will be woefully ill-equipped to handle the "challenges of this century." Mrs. Clinton's call not to stereotype government as "absolute villains" is near impossible because the stereotype has become reality.