

REMARKS ON NATIONAL MARRIAGE WEEK

by

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Thank you, Pastor Ron, for affording me this opportunity to speak. And thank you all for attending and participating.

My name is Karen Testerman and I am a Republican candidate for Governor.

This past Saturday we acknowledge the birthday of one of our favorite presidents, Ronald Reagan. During a 1977 speech he stated, "Families must continue to be the foundation of our nation.

Families—not government programs—are the best way to make sure our children are properly nurtured, our elderly are cared for, our cultural and spiritual heritages are perpetuated, our laws are observed and our values are preserved." In other words, families are the backbone of America.

But as we look around us we find that our families are fractured or not forming as in cohabitation. There is an economic impact that comes with allowing marriages to fail and unwed parenthood to grow. Taxpayers see it in the budget of this state as expenditures for the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Justice. The Department of Health and Human Services alone makes up approximately 28% of the state's budget.

A recent study by the Institute for American Values conservatively estimates that the cost to NH taxpayers of divorce and unwed childbearing is \$99 million a year.

Children and women are impoverished by divorce. Research shows that single mothers have only 1/3 of the financial assets as their married counterparts. Research further shows that children raised with both their mother and father in the home have higher graduation rates, do better in school and get in trouble less with the law and have lower rates of incarceration.

Our prisons are full of inmates who went to bed at night without a father in the home. According to the Department of Justice, 70% of juveniles in state operated institutions come from fatherless homes. The cost to the taxpayers of NH for the fracturing of families through divorce and unwed childbearing is at a minimum cost to the taxpayers of \$99 million per year.

Ronald Reagan went on to say, "Thus it is imperative that our government's programs, actions, officials and social welfare institutions never be allowed to jeopardize the family. We fear the government may be powerful enough to destroy our families; we know that it is not powerful enough to replace them. [We]... must be committed to working always in the interest of the American family.

Every dollar spent by government is a dollar earned by individuals. Government must always ask: Are your dollars being wisely spent? Can we afford it? Is it not better for the country to leave your dollars in your pocket?"

Divorce impoverishes children and women. Looking at the levels of poverty among our children under the age of 6, 55% are living with single mothers, while a mere 11% live in households with a married mom and dad. Where a father is present in the home the lives of children are improved. A father with a HS degree adds on average \$360K to his lifetime income.

When we have the evidence and the common sense to know that intact families will solve a good portion of our spending woes, doesn't it make sense to do what we can to make sure that men and women who get married stay married? If we in NH helped just 10% of those couples headed for divorce court to stay together we could save the taxpayers of this state just under \$10 million a year.

We could launch an ad campaign, using part of the Lottery advertising campaign budget to promote healthy marriages. Several NH churches and non-profit organizations are currently running programs to encourage preparation for marriage, marriage enrichment and marriage mentoring. The nice thing about these programs is that there is no additional cost to the taxpayers and we are not generating a new government program.

With looming budgets and spending out of control, NH must get it right. We as a state must do more than put bandages on a bleeding economy through government programs. By reducing the rate of divorce and unwed childbearing through a promotion of healthy marriages we can make a difference not only in the well being of our state but also in the financial health of our state.

February 7-14 is National Marriage Week. Let's find ways to encourage couples to get and stay married.

Thank you.