
Defending the Family

A Report on Pro-Family Public Policy

LDS Dems - 2016



Introduction

*Then wake up and do something more
Than dream of your mansion above...
“Have I Done Any Good?”¹*

Latter-day Saints love families. After our experiences in mortality are complete, we believe that we will be reunited with our families and our Eternal Parents to live and serve together throughout eternity. These beliefs in a progressive hereafter do not, however, excuse us from taking active steps to do what's right during our time on Earth. Our belief in the eternal grace of God and the Plan of Salvation is enhanced by an understanding of personal choice and accountability in this life.

We don't, for example, abuse our bodies and justify our actions with the belief that the Resurrection will fix everything. We don't justify sin with the belief that the Atonement will “cover us” in the next life, *unless* we repent in this one. We don't pollute Creation with the excuse that our planet will be restored in the Millennium. And we don't justify anti-family public policies with the assertion that all injustices on Earth will be made right after death.

This report outlines key opportunities to defend the family, and is motivated by a fervent desire to follow the counsel of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

WE CALL UPON responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.²

Some Republicans, particularly in Utah, seem to think that the most important fight in defense of the family takes place in the pages of a dictionary. We disagree. We echo Elder M. Russell Ballard's call on “government and political leaders to put the needs of children and parents **first** and to think in terms of family impact in **all legislation and policy making.**”³ To follow this counsel on just a few narrow legislative or policy matters strikes us as little more than cafeteria morality.

This report, then, will discuss important pro-family issues including immigration and refugees, healthcare, education, the environment, our LGBTQ brothers and sisters, paid family leave, criminal justice reform, family planning, and poverty. This document constitutes an introductory effort and is not considered exhaustive. We plan to add additional sections in future reports according to pertinent discussions of public policy.

We, the LDS Democrats Caucus, turn to these issues with a preemptive word of humility. We strongly and boldly stand for what we understand to be policies that will maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society. While our tone may occasionally seem harsh to our opponents, please understand that we are not accusing those who disagree with us of being malicious or of ill intent. We agree that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should, in good conscience, choose to affiliate with the political party that best espouses their personal values. We also believe policies that relying on a very limited definition of morality will hurt families. We cannot sit idly by without standing for the truths we hold dear.

Immigration and Refugees

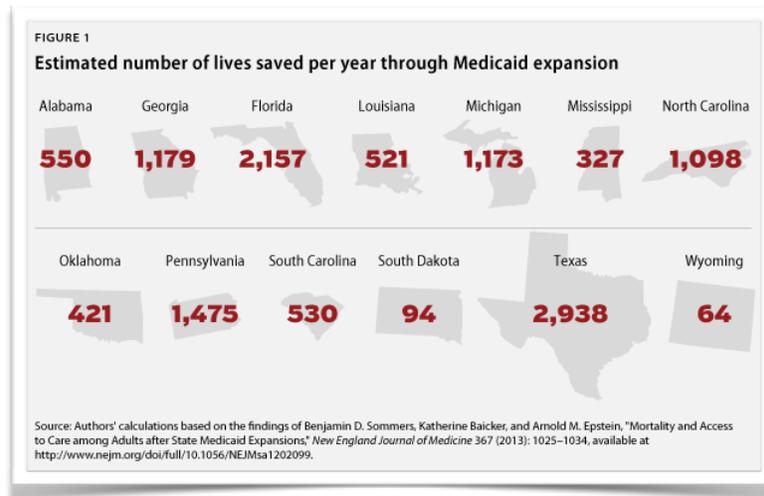
Some contemporary pundits like to insist that immigrants and refugees are a burden or a danger to society. While the facts certainly indicate otherwise,⁴ it is also important to look at the underlying beliefs that motivate such callous and uneducated perspectives. The United States of America itself was founded by immigrants and refugees, fleeing other nations for a fair shot at social justice, religious freedom, and/or political refuge. The family tree of Utah has grown from these refugee and immigrant branches. God led refugee Brigham Young to declare Utah as "the Right Place," primarily because all the other "Places" had expelled the Mormons. Americans, Utahns, and Mormons are all descended from immigrants and refugees. Demonizing them today is thus beyond hypocritical.

Immigrants are our brothers and sisters. It is our moral obligation to treat these families with love and acceptance. When the question is asked about their impact on the economy, we believe that analysts who disparage them are wrong. Contrary to harming the economy, immigrants boost the US economy through innovation, research, and education.⁵ While some who peddle fear and prey on insecurity make bombastic claims about immigrants stealing "our" jobs, immigrants do not actually have any significant negative impact on wages or jobs for non-immigrant workers.⁶

Immigrants and refugees belong to *families*. They are mothers and fathers, siblings, and members of precious extended family networks. Demonizing them is in no way pro-family. In fact, anti-immigrant and anti-refugee policies actually value imaginary fears more than they value *the fundamental unit of society*. As LDS Democrats, we welcome immigrants and refugees and support public policies that support their families, including protection of human rights, creation of paths to citizenship, educational opportunities, economic stability, and other supportive resources.

Healthcare

It is counter to our beliefs concerning the family to ration healthcare based on wealth, as Utah's current system does. In an attempt to counteract this trend of excluding some families from the healthcare system based on their access to money,⁷ we call for immediate and complete expansion of Medicaid.⁸ We also call for research into alternative health care systems that do not disrespect our brothers and sisters by keeping preventative and lifesaving procedures from them because they haven't made enough money.



We are discouraged by the reticence of some in government to extend health insurance to those who need while openly supporting earmarking millions to benefit large corporations.⁹ On the other hand, we are impressed by other countries of the world who prioritize the health of families above such metrics as "low" tax rates.¹⁰ We look forward to the day when our national healthcare policies can achieve the pro-family orientation embraced by so many countries around the world.

Education

We echo the Book of Mormon prophet Nephi's condemnation of his society when his people "began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches."¹¹ Utah's shamefully poor education system ranks toward the bottom of far too many measures, particularly when taking into consideration the state's demographics.¹² We call on our government to ensure that all children in our state have

access to "great learning," regardless of their level of "riches."¹³ Latter-day Saints know that the family is and should be treated as the fundamental unit of society. This requires that Utah's children have equal access to top-quality education.

The Environment

The earth and all things on it should be used responsibly to sustain the human family. However, all are stewards — not owners — over this earth and its bounty and will be accountable before God for what they do with His creations. -LDS.org ¹⁴

We believe that the Earth and all living things are divine creations. The Creator uses qualities other than how "business-friendly" we are to determine how well we care for His divine handiwork, and we see too many examples of poor stewardship surrounding us. For example, our state has desecrated its air so thoroughly that children are regularly kept inside during recess to avoid the negative health effects created by simply breathing and playing in the outside air.¹⁵ Worse yet, it is estimated that between 1,000 and 2,000 Utahns die each year due to the terrible air quality in this state.¹⁶ Their families are ripped apart because our government is unwilling to take the steps necessary to clean the air and improve emission standards.



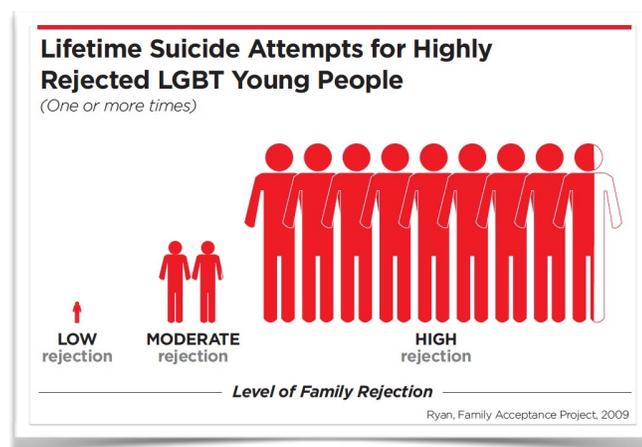
A disregard for Creation runs so deep in our society that, despite the looming and compounding negative effects of climate abuse,¹⁷ our elected officials routinely perpetuate environmental destruction to protect business interests. When we treat the profit of large corporations as more valuable than the families of this state, we make a mockery of the sanctity of the family and actively condemn too many of our brothers and sisters to die on our watch.

Our LGBTQ Sisters and Brothers

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints espouses a clear position on the definition of marriage. This section does not comment on these teachings, but rather on the urgent need for development and enforcement of public policy that protects *all* families. Regardless of personal ideology, the Supreme Court has spoken. We can no longer legally treat our LGBTQ brothers and sisters as second-class members of our communities. As our faith teaches, each of us is "a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny." We echo Church leaders who teach that all families are *families*, even if they aren't all the same:

Earthly families all look different. And while we do the best we can to create strong traditional families, membership in the family of God is not contingent upon any kind of status—marital status, parental status, financial status, social status, or even the kind of status we post on social media. -Sister Carole M. Stephens, LDS General Conference, April 2015¹⁸

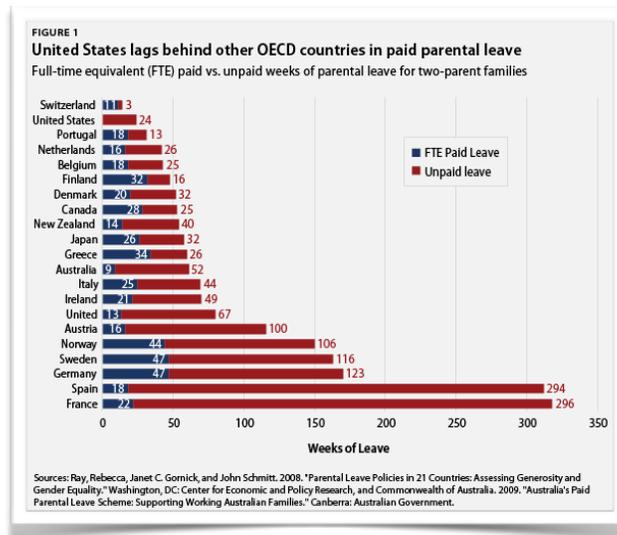
Based on our eternal beliefs in the nature and diversity of the human family, we call for protection of LGBTQ families, just as we call for protection of *all* families in this state. This protection involves access to housing, employment, benefits, education, and healthcare.



This call is made all the more urgent due to the effects of our neglect. Research has shown that the way society treats these members of our human family has a direct impact on their well-being.¹⁹

Paid Family Leave

We join Elder Quentin L. Cook in calling for Latter-day Saints to “be at the forefront in creating an environment in the workplace that is more receptive and accommodating to both women and men in their responsibilities as parents.”²⁰ We are inspired by parts of the world where families are so thoroughly valued that new parents are guaranteed significant time with their newborn(s).²¹ This practice, known colloquially as “paid maternity / paternity leave,” is truly a pro-family policy. It doesn’t take academic research to understand that the parent-child relationship is most tender and impactful in the first few years of a child’s life.²² It doesn’t take academic research to prove the enormous pro-family impacts of prioritizing parenthood over profit.²³ Furthermore, the costs incurred by families without paid leave who cannot afford to take time off from work means that families suffer and businesses lose. Utah, and the rest of the United States, lags far behind in this regard.



Criminal Justice Reform/Addiction

If the family is indeed the fundamental unit of a society, our treatment of our citizens should align with a more compassionate criminal justice system focused on building people up and not locking them away. Non-violent offenders should not be sent to prison for decades at a

time with no chance of reduction of their sentences. Families of criminals shouldn't be charged exorbitant rates just to speak with their incarcerated family members.²⁴ Punitive practices should not supersede rehabilitative efforts.

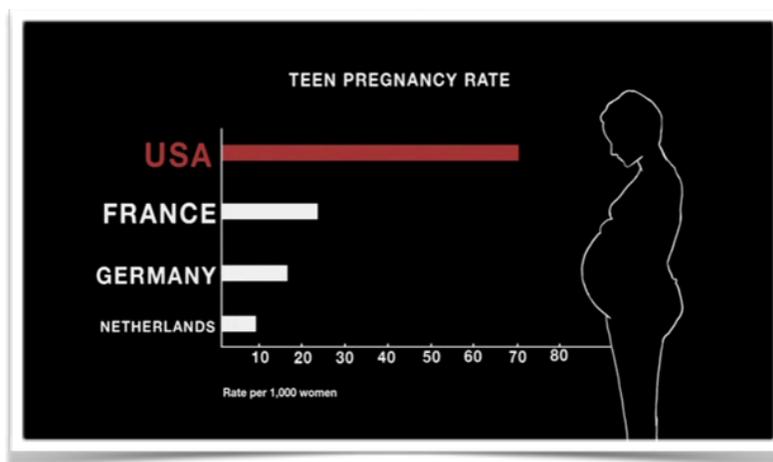
When families are central to a state's criminal justice system, its first priority is compassion rather than vengeance. The system focuses more on restoration than on retaliation, and concerted efforts are made to mitigate the impact of incarceration on children.

Tragically, Utah currently treats addiction as a legal issue rather than a health issue. To us, this flawed mindset is akin to throwing someone into prison because they have cancer and ripping apart his/her family. Drug addiction is a disease and should be treated compassionately as such. Any action otherwise prioritizes exacting punishment above providing treatment for thousands of suffering families across this state.

Family Planning

Many Utah lawmakers identify abortion as an incredibly important family-related issue. We consider this issue a deeply personal consideration. Many among the ranks of our organization are pro-life, and many are pro-choice. We have room within our caucus for diversity of opinion and respectful discussion surrounding this issue.

Often lost within the contentious debate surrounding abortion and the specific teachings pertaining to abortion within the LDS Church is another important consideration—how to reduce unplanned pregnancies. The research is abundantly clear that the best and safest way



to reduce teen pregnancy²⁵ and decrease the number of unplanned pregnancies²⁶ in our state is to support comprehensive sex education initiatives. When these programs are carefully implemented, families across the spectrum benefit greatly and unwanted pregnancies diminish.²⁷

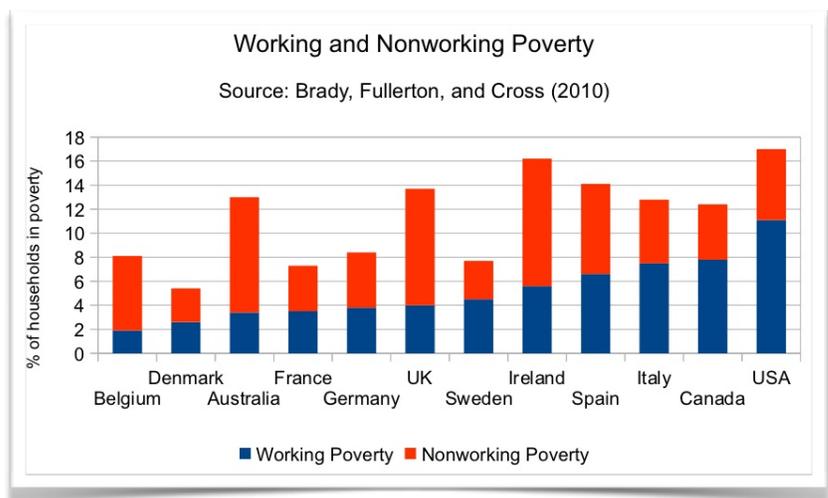
Similarly, if we truly want to decrease abortion rates, supporting comprehensive sex education can have an immediate and concrete impact on thousands of families. It seems resolutely anti-family to use abortion as a wedge issue to drive voters to a particular party rather than take proactive measures to solve the underlying problem.²⁸

Poverty

[T]he great Redeemer has issued no more persistent call than for us to join Him in lifting this burden [of poverty] from the people. -Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, General Conference, October 2014²⁹

We echo Elder Jeffrey R. Holland in reaffirming the centrality of the plight of those who are the least among us and our collective responsibility to help the poor. The central question of poverty, however, is, “how can we best mitigate it?” The answer is far from simple.³⁰

American conservatism advocates that the solution to poverty is an increased focus on the institution of marriage.³¹ This viewpoint is shortsighted politics. In actuality, the research demonstrates time and again that causality more often flows the other direction—the poor are not poor because of weak family situations.³² Instead, weak family situations are *caused by* poverty. If we want to improve the quality of families, we can recognize and address the scythe of poverty that rips through so many homes in Utah.³³ The truly pro-family



action on this issue is to enact policies that address structural solutions to poverty, i.e. equal pay for equal work, protections for workers' rights, access to high quality education, a living minimum wage, and robust social safety nets. The end result of these pro-family economic policies yields increased numbers of stable, strong, and self-reliant families.

In 2015, Utah's Intergenerational Welfare Reform Commission found that intergenerational poverty limits families' access to education, nutrition, and safe environments.³⁴ Similarly, it is important to note that empirically sound research consistently identifies the root causes of poverty as being associated with chronically broken structures and systems, not a lack of personal responsibility.³⁵ In fact, significant numbers of poor people, both in Utah, and across the nation, are working hard (see America's high levels of "working poverty" in graphic above) and pursuing an education in hopes of lifting themselves out of poverty.³⁶

When we fail to address poverty, our failure trickles down to future generations, digging holes for families that their children are unable to escape.³⁷ While it might be reassuring to embrace the false teachings of worldly "experts" and blame the poor for their poverty, the LDS Democrats Caucus echoes the teachings of modern prophets and the preponderance of high-quality research to assert that the poor should not be blamed for their plight.

Conclusion

We can no longer sit idly by as the sanctity of our human family is under attack. Can anyone in good conscience call themselves "pro-family" unless they are actively, practically, and concretely looking out for the welfare of all families, regardless of wealth, religion, skin color, gender, ethnicity, health, or sexual orientation? As we work to embody the values we embrace, we hope our Republican colleagues and friends will reject anti-family policies and commit with us to enact policies that truly strengthen, protect, and maintain families all across the state as the fundamental unit of society.

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- ¹ <https://www.lds.org/music/library/hymns/have-i-done-any-good?lang=eng>
- ² From The Family: A Proclamation to the World <https://www.lds.org/topics/family-proclamation?lang=eng>
- ³ "What Matters Most is What Lasts Longest" <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2005/10/what-matters-most-is-what-lasts-longest?lang=eng> (emphasis added)
- ⁴ <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/41645?index=8711>
- ⁵ <http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/2014/12/02/How-Immigrants-Boost-US-Economic-Growth>
- ⁶ <http://clas.berkeley.edu/research/immigration-economic-benefits-immigration>
- ⁷ which in many cases leads to their early deaths: as described in http://familiesusa.org/sites/default/files/product_documents/Dying-for-Coverage.pdf and http://familiesusa.org/sites/default/files/product_documents/MCD_ACS%20Data%20Report_web.pdf and <http://www.pnhp.org/facts/quality.pdf>
- ⁸ Medicaid expansion has a significant impact on families across the country: http://familiesusa.org/sites/default/files/product_documents/MCD_Fed%20Defense_Factsheet_Medicaid%20Adults_web.pdf
- ⁹ <http://www.sltrib.com/home/4208725-155/west-jordan-mulls-240-million-incentive>
- ¹⁰ See this World Health Organization report on the effects of prioritizing the health of our families below our personal and corporate financial gain: http://www.who.int/whr/2000/media_centre/press_release/en/. Chart source: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/healthcare/news/2013/04/01/57839/access-to-medicaid-reduces-mortality-rates/>
- ¹¹ 3 Nephi 6:12: <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm/3-ne/6.12?lang=eng#11>
- ¹² It's no secret that Utah is lagging far behind most other states in access to quality K-12 education: <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2016/01/07/2016-education-rankings-put-states-nation-to-the-test.html> and <http://www.edweek.org/ew/qc/2016/state-highlights/2016/01/07/utah-education-ranking.html>. Chart from http://trib.com/news/state-and-regional/how-does-wyoming-education-rank/article_26136fb1-072c-5dc5-a241-f449abb19c65.html
- ¹³ <http://www.nber.org/papers/w12652.pdf>
- ¹⁴ Environmental Stewardship and Conservation, <https://www.lds.org/topics/environmental-stewardship-and-conservation?lang=eng>
- ¹⁵ Seriously. <http://health.utah.gov/asthma/pdfs/airquality/recessguidance.pdf>
- ¹⁶ Dirty air is taking the lives of the most vulnerable among us--the elderly, the sick, and the young: <http://kutv.com/news/local/doctor-says-utahs-air-pollution-leading-to-premature-death-of-thousands>. See also <http://uphe.org/air-pollution-health/new-research/>

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- ¹⁷ <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673695901736> and http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/wg2/en/spmsspm-c-15-magnitudes-of.html and <http://www.skepticalscience.com/global-warming-positives-negatives-intermediate.htm> and <http://news.ubc.ca/2016/02/12/poor-air-quality-kills-5-5-million-worldwide-annually/> and finally <http://www.pnas.org/content/106/11/4133.full.pdf>. Chart source: <http://news.utexas.edu/2015/06/16/clean-air-globally-could-yield-large-health-benefits>
- ¹⁸ The Family is of God https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2015/04/the-family-is-of-god?lang=eng&_r=1
- ¹⁹ When we do nothing to affirm society's love to our LGBTQ brothers and sisters but begrudgingly compromise to give them the same legal rights as the rest of society, is it any wonder they don't feel loved? These studies discuss the empirical research on the effects of society's actions and chart out concrete actions <http://rationalfaiths.com/the-lgbtq-mormon-crisis-responding-to-the-empirical-research-on-suicide/> and <http://rationalfaiths.com/mormon-religious-context-and-lgbt-youth-suicides-an-additional-empirical-analysis/>. Chart source: <http://www.new-hope-recovery.com/center/2014/09/08/loving-families-help-lgbt-teens-avoid-addiction-suicide/>
- ²⁰ "LDS Women are Incredible" <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2011/04/lds-women-are-incredible?lang=eng>
- ²¹ Talk about pro-family: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/12/12/among-38-nations-u-s-is-the-holdout-when-it-comes-to-offering-paid-parental-leave/>
- ²² Paid family leave is the gimme of pro-family policies. It's almost too easy: <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/paid-leave/paid-family-and-medical-leave.pdf> and <http://www.dol.gov/wb/PaidLeave/PaidLeave.htm> and <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3150137/> and <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/paid-parental-leave-in-the-united-states-what-the-data-tell-us-about-access-usage-and-economic-and-health-benefits/> and <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.0013-0133.2005.00971.x/abstract> and <http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2015/images/10/28/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf> and http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2015/images/10/28/15-061_text.pdf and <http://arno.uvt.nl/show.cgi?fid=133880>
- ²³ Academic research demonstrating that it's better to prioritize parenthood over profit: <http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2015/images/10/28/paternitybrief.pdf> and <http://www.irpa.is/article/view/1211> and <http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/29/health/paid-leave-benefits-to-children-research/>
- ²⁴ Who wins in this situation? Struggling families, or profit-driven corporations and punitive institutions: <http://www.cityweekly.net/utah/prison-skype-replaces-visitation/Content?oid=3263059>
- ²⁵ Reducing teen pregnancy is fairly straightforward: <http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Feature.showFeature&featureID=1041> and <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3194801/>
- ²⁶ This study explores ways to reduce unplanned pregnancies. Spoiler alert: comprehensive sex ed plays a big role: <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/social-mobility-memos/posts/2013/11/01-reducing-unplanned-pregnancy-sawhill-karpilow>
- ²⁷ We consider this to be a prime example of the power of being more pro-family than pro-win-the-argument http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/comprehensive_sex_education_and_academic_success.pdf

²⁸ An inspired quote comes to mind about the folly of hacking at branches and ignoring the roots. Inspired research backs that up: <https://www.gutmacher.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/journals/3711005.pdf>. Chart source: <http://www.bitlanders.com/blogs/why-we-need-comprehensive-sex-ed/61416>

²⁹ "Are We Not All Beggars?" <http://www.lds.org/general-conference/2014/10/are-we-not-all-beggars?lang=eng>

³⁰ see, for example, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/the_great_divergence/features/2010/the_united_states_of_inequality/introducing_the_great_divergence.html

³¹ the data suggest otherwise: <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/03/marriage-poverty/473019/> and <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/social-mobility-memos/posts/2014/01/21-3-policies-to-close-family-formation-class-divide-sawhill>

³² http://www.ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/The-Ever-Growing-Gap-CFED_IPS-Final-1.pdf

³³ for example, check out *Harvard Business Review* on the link between income inequality and physical pain <https://hbr.org/2016/03/the-link-between-income-inequality-and-physical-pain> and this gem about Utah's high numbers of low-income children: http://www.nccp.org/profiles/UT_profile_6.html

³⁴ <http://www.sltrib.com/home/3001085-155/modest-gains-highlight-utah-program-to>

³⁵ for a look at other factors outside individuals' control, see <http://eml.berkeley.edu/~saez/saez-UStopincomes-2012.pdf> and <http://borgenproject.org/what-causes-global-poverty/> and <http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/what-causes-poverty> and <http://www.lopparl.gc.ca/content/lop/researchpublications/prb0914-e.htm#a6> and https://web.archive.org/web/20110812110422/http://conferences.ifpri.org/2020Chinaconference/pdf/beijingbrief_ahmed2.pdf and https://campus.fsu.edu/bbcswebdav/institution/academic/social_sciences/sociology/Reading%20Lists/Mental%20Health%20Readings/Link-HealthSocial-1995.pdf

³⁶ <http://poverty.ucdavis.edu/faq/who-are-working-poor> and <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/static/media/files/Working-Poor-in-America-report-Oxfam-America.pdf> and <http://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/working-poor/archive/a-profile-of-the-working-poor-2013.pdf> and <http://www.amazon.com/Working-Poor-Invisible-America/dp/0375708219> and <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/low-wage-2012-01.pdf> and <http://economistsview.typepad.com/.a/6a00d83451b33869e20168e9f3787c970c-popup>

³⁷ http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_909.html and <http://poverty.ucdavis.edu/children-intergenerational-transmission-poverty>. Chart from https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Working_poor