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Laws can't hug children, but they can hurt them

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Editor's note: Morna Murray, special counsel to Democratic Sen. Robert P. Casey Jr. of Pennsylvania, is a new blogger for NCR Today. Read more about her.

As the Democrats lay out their policy plans for the future this week, it is helpful to contrast that prescription with last week's Republican convention. Gov. Mitt Romney gave what the media have largely agreed is the best speech of his career. When he spoke of his parents, his children, his wife, it was moving. His devotion to his family, his faith and his marriage is admirable. Romney -- and his running mate, Paul Ryan -- often make statements about the importance of family, of loving our children and helping those children reach their potential.

But which children are they talking about?

There are two sentences from Romney's speech I think are particularly worth noting right now:

"All the laws and legislation in the world will never heal this world like the loving hearts and arms of mothers and fathers. If every child could drift to sleep feeling wrapped in the love of their family -- and God's love -- this world would be a far more gentle and better place." [Source]

Who can disagree with the idea that every child going to sleep feeling genuinely loved would make this world a better place? It's something many of us have devoted our personal and/or professional lives to, in one venue or another. Romney, the man, seems to truly believe this sentiment.

The policy statements and positions of Romney, the candidate, do not support it, though. They, in fact, contradict it.

Let's look at it this way. No one can disagree that laws and legislation will never heal the world and children the way the love of parents can.

However, is the flip side true? Can laws and legislation actually hurt children, particularly poor and disadvantaged children? Can laws and legislation make it more difficult for children to feel secure, go to bed without being hungry, be healthy, be able to concentrate in school, afford higher education? The list goes on.

The factual answer to that flip-side question is an emphatic yes. Yes, there are laws that have passed the U.S. House of Representatives that would make the lives of vulnerable and struggling children and families far more difficult. The most comprehensive and harmful of these is the Paul Ryan Budget, passed by the U.S. House on March 29 by a vote of 228-191. Not a single Democrat voted for it. Ten Republicans voted against it. Romney endorsed it, despite the fact that he says the Republican ticket is running on "his" budget, which has yet to be defined.

Here are just a few facts about the Ryan Budget from analyses by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (The Ryan Budget has been called "Robin Hood in reverse -- on steroids" by CBPP president Robert Greenstein.):

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- Cuts Medicaid, the nation's health care safety net for the poor and disabled, by \$800 billion.
- Cuts food stamps (now called SNAP -- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) by \$133 billion.
- Slashes non-defense discretionary spending for a multitude of programs, including: child care for the working poor (who need this assistance to be able to work); low-income housing; meals to housebound low-income seniors Pell Grants the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, which provides nutrition to new mothers and newborns and many others.

Does the Ryan Budget reduce the deficit? No. It institutes four hefty tax cuts, all of which would disproportionately (watch that word -- disproportionately) benefit the wealthiest of Americans, and cost our country \$4.6 trillion in lost revenue. Added to that would be another \$5 trillion in lost revenue from Ryan's proposal to make the tax cuts by President George W. Bush permanent.

Ryan likes to talk about his Catholic faith, and he claimed at a speech at Georgetown University (protested by dozens of high profile Catholic theologians) that his budget was "grounded" in Catholic social teaching. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops disagreed. In a letter dated April 16, the bishops decried Ryan's budget, saying it failed to meet "moral criteria" by disproportionately (there's that word again) cutting programs that "serve poor and vulnerable people." The criticism of Ryan's budget by policymakers and experts, people of faith, advocates, etc., has been overwhelming. It is an ideological document. It does not solve real problems.

Yet inexplicably, Romney and Ryan continue to make statements that their policy positions purport to "care" for vulnerable Americans. That is emphatically not true.

Back to children. Talking about numbers and budget cuts is one thing. But those numbers translate into real children and real families. There are millions of children going to bed hungry every night, right here in this country, losing health care, food stamps, school lunches. For hundreds of thousands of children,

school lunch is the only hot meal, perhaps the only meal, they eat all day.

Romney, the man, often says heartwarming things about wanting children to have better lives. But Romney, the candidate, would institute policies that would make the lives of those children even more difficult. No, laws and legislation cannot hug children. But they can hurt them -- terribly, and with profound lifelong consequences. That is disturbing. It is something we all need to know.

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