

OUTLOOK

POLITICS

# The last trump card for conservatives: addressing flood of fatherless children

By George Radanovich

The hand-wringing began even before the polls were closed. As the conservative hopes of winning the White House and talking back the Senate were buried under the avalanche of early returns, the finger-pointing and reflective introspection commenced in earnest. How could we have lost this election? And would we ever win another one? The answer to the second question, in the present cultural environment, is most likely no.

In an age of entitlement and dependency the conservative message of self-reliance and limited government is seen as a quaint anachronism, a relic, an artifact of a bygone era.

Since the 1960s, a civil cold war of sorts has raged and the two main political camps often erupt into open warfare. Imagine two cultural tectonic plates smashing into one another. The first plate represents the traditional, the constitutional, the self-governed. The second, victimhood, entitlement, dependence on government. As the plates collide something must give. In this metaphor, and in this present age, the first plate is buried under the second. The resulting cultural shift is cataclysmic and irrevocably final. To the fatalist conservative, the country as it was known is over. But is it?

Conservatives need to learn that sometimes circumstances only get worse until a higher and greater cause prevails. The bitter and bloody national struggle to save the "best hope of Earth" is a perfect example of this truth.

During the early and darkest days of the Civil War, as the Army of the Potomac suffered defeat after defeat at the hands of a determined enemy, President Abraham Lincoln struggled to save the Union. After vowing not to touch the institution of slavery, he finally issued the Emancipation Proclamation after the bloody battle of Antietam. Now, the ending of slavery was a central goal of the war. A moral context was provided for the bloody struggle ahead.

In October 1862, in a cartoon published in Engle's Punch magazine, John Tenniel portrayed the



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Emancipation Proclamation as Lincoln's "desperate last-trump card." Whether this statement was true or not, many consider the proclamation to be a turning point in the war that preserved the Union. It was as if, under the all seeing eye of a good and just Creator, we would lose the Union if we didn't cast off slavery.

Although our current struggle is largely bloodless, the country is more culturally divided now than at any time since the Civil War. Political positions are intractable. To the conservative, the excessive reach of government and rising debt threaten freedom and liberty. Progressives don't see the threat. But while progressives continue their "let government fix everything" spending, conservatives carry on with the foolish assumption that our cul-

ture is ready for reduced government services.

After devastating electoral losses, conservatives are realizing that America is shunning their message. Like Lincoln, they may be down to one desperate last trump card. Addressing fatherlessness, unwed pregnancy and divorce is the higher and greater cause that conservatives should champion.

The evidence is clear and cannot be disputed. The social, emotional and economic costs of diminished lives caused by fatherlessness, unwed pregnancy and divorce are not sustainable.

The high instances of divorce and children born out of wedlock are resulting in increasing numbers of single-parent households, leaving many children in poverty and

without the positive influence of a father figure.

Children in father-absent homes are two to three times more likely to:

- Be victims of child and sexual abuses.
- Use drugs.
- Experience educational, health, emotional and behavior problems.
- Become teen parents.
- Engage in criminal behavior.

The news gets even worse. Children in father-absent homes are twice as likely to end up in jail. Of the youth who commit suicide, 63 percent come from father-absent homes. Seventy-one percent of high school dropouts come from father-absent homes. Nearly 75 percent of children raised in homes without fathers will experience poverty before the age of 11, compared to 50 percent of those raised in two-parent homes. Government's cost

to support a fatherless family is \$55,000 per year. Today 40 percent of all American children will go to sleep in father-absent homes.

In 2010, the United States recorded 1,633,471 out-of-wedlock births. Teen births put mothers at high risk for poverty. Eighty percent of teen mothers become lifetime welfare recipients.

Children of teen moms are more likely to become teen parents themselves, and the cycle of poverty becomes generational and vicious. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, an independent, nonprofit health research organization, has estimated that America's extraordinarily high rate of teen births costs the taxpayer \$9.1 billion per year and the costs to the institutions of society as a whole are more than twice that amount.

In 2008 between \$90,000 to \$90,000 couples in the United States filed for divorce. During the same year, the nation's divorce-to-marriage ratio was approximately 70 percent. According to a study conducted at the University of Utah in 2006 by Dr. David Schramm, each divorce costs approximately \$20,000 in added social services to local communities as parents, especially divorced mothers, turn to government-funded programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food stamps, and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) for assistance.

Knowing this, it should come as no surprise that a report released in October of this year by the Congressional Research Service indicates that, at \$735.4 billion per year, welfare programs have surpassed Medicare and Social Security as the largest federal budget item.

But there is a flicker of hope that emanates from the private sector. In 1997, a group of city leaders in Chattanooga, Tenn., came together to form a community-wide initiative to rebuild, renew and revitalize their city.

Recognizing these national trends, they concluded that the strength of their community and the future of their city resided in the health of the family. Called First Things First, they started an experiment to see if they could change attitudes and behaviors

concerning marriage and divorce, unwed pregnancies and fatherlessness, setting three strategic goals to reduce fatherlessness, unwed pregnancy and the divorce rate all by 30 percent in 10 years. After 15 years they have seen a 27 percent decrease in the divorce rate, a 63 percent decrease in teen out-of-wedlock pregnancies and a significant increase in father involvement in the lives of their children. By persuasion and encouragement within their communities they harnessed the power of the private sector, not legislation or government, to achieve this goal.

Their unique approach has triggered many to replicate similar initiatives in other cities across the country. In addition to achieving the same rate of success as Chattanooga, a California group, Restore Fresno, seeks to reduce or eliminate government social programs that facilitate the destruction of families while the private sector strengthens them.

Statistics show that success in the pursuit of happiness is far more difficult without a solid foundation built by a child's biological parents from the beginning of life. Statistics also show that children who have this foundation are less of a burden on government.

Chattanooga is proving that the private sector can strengthen families by reducing fatherlessness, unwed pregnancy and divorce. This is where the path to less government begins. Government can only exacerbate this moral dilemma; it cannot put an end to it. But Americans willing to address the cultural issues of fatherlessness, unwed pregnancy and divorce, they will be on the side of the angels.

They will win the hearts of the American people, heal our divided nation, reduce government and preserve our role as the beacon of freedom and liberty in the world. Responding to this higher cause and implementing this grand idea is the conservatives', and the nation's, desperate trump card.

Radanovich, a Republican, served 16 years in the U.S. House of Representatives until his retirement in 2000. His columns often revolve to this article.

COMMERCE

# Businesses have options when it comes to defending their reputations against defamation on the Internet

By Paul Kerlin and Christopher Anderson

False reviews, cyber attacks and other types of Internet defamation are increasingly causing damage to businesses' reputations and can ultimately hinder — and even destroy — a business. These online attacks have long been executed by disgruntled customers, angry employees and conniving competitors who believed they were hidden behind a cloak of anonymity. That's no longer the case. And as online reviews are ever more valuable to a business's reputation, more companies are combating false reviews and defamers through the use of both investigative and legal tactics.

In the past, a company's only option would be to turn to online reputation management professionals, who use search-engine optimization tactics to push and content down in search results. This method is becoming increasingly difficult due to changes in search algorithms, which means the visibility and impact of false statements could substantially increase over time

as the information moves up search indices, is copied by other links, etc.

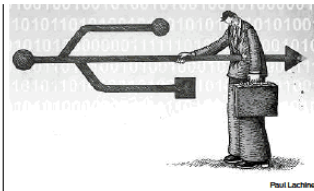
However, new methods are being employed across the country that differ from traditional online reputation management. Business owners and executives are now able to identify the attackers, remove the harmful material from the Internet and search indices, stop the attackers from posting false information about the company again and, in some instances, even recover losses.

There are many cases in which attackers are bound and determined to hurt a particular company. Legitimate opinions of unhappy customers are protected speech, just as they should be. However, if posts are false, create a misleading impression, intentionally interfere with a business, intentionally inflict emotional distress or contain private or sensitive business information, the defamer — even if he believes he is "anonymous" — can oftentimes be identified, located and stopped. We fre-

quently find that online attacks are being instigated, not only by disgruntled customers, but also by competitors, ex-employees and ex-business partners. Although these types of solutions are available, many companies victimized by cyber attacks have often been advised incorrectly. Unfortunately, missteps in this area can lead to continued damage. Actions must be taken quickly because in most states, including Texas, the statute of limitations takes effect after just one year. After this short period of time, no one can take action to remove these cyber attacks, even if, one day, the defamatory statement rises to the first page of a Google search.

As use of the Internet continues to increase, a business's ability to manage its reputation online will be imperative. Business professionals should remember these common misconceptions when considering this option to manage their company's online reputation.

**1. The statements are covered by freedom of speech.** The courts have



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repeatedly recognized that the First Amendment does not protect false statements and other illegal conduct.

**2. Nobody will remove it anyway.** Oftentimes we find the removal of damaging information can occur quickly. Court orders can also be obtained for removal if appropriate legal claims exist.

**3. You can't catch anonymous posters.** By using investigative techniques coupled with court-ordered subpoenas, it's now

possible to resolve most cases. The first step to being able to effectively manage a company's online reputation is to understand the options that are available. When you realize that you're not dealing with just a disgruntled customer, but rather someone who is committed to destroying your business, you'll be able to take appropriate action.

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