

Institute of Marriage and Family Canada Press Release FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OTTAWA, CANADA, September 27, 2007—Good economic policy in support of good family policy was the topic for discussion at the second annual Institute of Marriage and Family Canada conference on September 27 in Ottawa. 80 delegates from government, think tanks, social agencies and the public gathered at the Sheraton Hotel to discuss how to best support the Canadian family with sound economic policy.

“All too often, those interested in social or family policy fail to see there is a direct link to a nation’s economic policy,” said Dave Quist, executive director of the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. “Or they believe that government policy has no effect on the welfare of the family. This is clearly not the case.”

Several scholars commented on how government policy affects families. Jennifer Roback Morse, an economist, has studied marriage and cohabitation from all angles and addressed the myth that marriage is just a contract, or a piece of paper. “If you are going to make a business analogy for marriage,” she said, “the business partnership is a better one. When you try to make marriage into a contract, saying ‘I’ll do this for you and you do that for me,’ you undermine parental cooperation.” She cited studies to show that cohabitation prior to marriage has no positive effect on marriages; cohabitation also takes a toll on children. Ultimately, she concluded that for public policy debates, the state has no interest in sanctioning cohabitation, but should rather give preference to marriage.

Protecting marriage was the subject taken on by the lunchtime keynote visiting from New York City, David Blankenhorn. He took on the notion that marriage is a purely private expression of love. “If that’s what marriage is,” he said, “then marriage is going out of business.” He talked about a goal of increasing the number of children who live with their own, married parents. When asked what the future of marriage was, he commented that no one knows the future, but back in the 1970s everyone commented that communism was a permanent fixture on the geopolitical landscape. He finally concluded that support for the family and marriage, done with hope and optimism is important, irrespective of the outcome.

Simon Fraser University economist, Doug Allen, addressed the negative incentives in Canada’s child support laws after marital dissolution. The amounts given create perverse incentives for parents faced with a troubled marriage—design flaws overcompensate for the “cost” of the children. “It encourages parents to divorce, under certain circumstances,” he said.

Patricia Morgan visiting from the UK spoke about child care in Europe, specifically in the United Kingdom, Italy and Sweden. Where many Canadians believe the Swedish model has been a success, she said, “socialized childcare in Sweden has turned out to be unimaginably expensive and ineffective.”

Not everyone addressed government policy shortcomings, however. Peter Shawn Taylor spoke about Canadian government successes in helping low income families thrive in Canada today. Taylor said, “Canada has seen some remarkable reductions in poverty over the past decade. For many groups, low income rates are at or below the lowest rates ever recorded. Seniors poverty has been largely wiped out,” he said. He went on: “But the issue of single parent poverty remains one of Canada’s biggest obstacles. ...The evidence suggests we should be encouraging greater employment rather than increases to welfare or other benefits.”

The Institute of Marriage and Family Canada conducts, compiles and presents family research to ensure that marriage and family-friendly policies are foremost in the minds of Canada’s decision makers. “It’s inspiring to see so many experts gathered together, all concerned about the success of the family in Canada,” said Quist. He continued: “We do need to address family issues with hope, optimism and good research. The IMFC is doing that.”

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For conference photos visit www.imfcanada.org. To arrange an interview, please contact Dave Quist at 613-565-3832