

OPINION

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COMMENTARY

Time to reform divorce laws

By Beverly Willett

No-fault divorce has been a disaster. Touted as the antidote to the animosity and high cost of family court litigation, it's been anything but. Divorce rates remain at nearly twice their pre-no-fault levels, while marriage rates have plummeted to a record low.

of so-called "good divorces," generally fare worse than children of parents from intact families, including those in mediocres or unhappy low-conflict marriages. Children of divorce are more likely to experience poverty, struggle with drug and alcohol abuse, suffer depression and diminished educational attainments, become teen mothers, commit suicide, and die earlier than their peers from intact families.

Granted, more than a purely legal fix is required. During the last four decades, there have been fundamental shifts in society, some good, some not so good. Cultural tentacles, too, have contributed to the demise of marriage — the stigmatization of unwed childbearing and adultery, the advancement of "soul-mate philosophy" as the best foundation for relationships, and the growth of hyper-individualism.

In short, we need divorce reform. The goal of reform is to reduce unnecessary divorce among those with minor children. By slowing the process, educating couples about the harmful effects of divorce, and providing skills to help them improve their relationships, reform could save marriages and ensure that more children grow up in two-parent families.

No returned to ground-based divorce) would ban divorce. The majority of the proposals are modest in scope, retain no-fault divorce, and merely extend the waiting period and require couples to attend counseling or other marriage education classes before rushing to sever their families.

Any conversation about marriage that can best shore it up. In short, law and culture must work hand in hand. But one function of law is to remind us of what we value in a culture, and our current divorce laws remind us that marriage is not very high on the list.

I'm a liberal Democrat from New York who, several years ago, co-founded the bipartisan Coalition for Divorce Reform (CDR).

With so much at stake, is a little patience and a four-hour class such an indignity? Can anyone predict with certainty that one child or the next will commit suicide or that the culprit if they do is traceable directly to divorce?

We can't let fear stop the conversation. The columnist Megan McArdle contends, "When you make it harder to exit, you also make people reluctant to enter." Really? Is that why, before no-fault divorce, 72 percent of adults were married, while that rate is just shy of 50 percent today?

After 4 1/2 decades of no-fault divorce, the research is solid: Most divorces involve low-conflict marriages, and waiting periods generally correlate to lower divorce rates. Children of divorce, including those

Divorce reform does not seek to roll back the clock. To the contrary, advocates take protection for spousely and children seriously; it's why the CDR specifically calls for retaining protection for domestic-violence victims. Moreover, two-thirds of all divorces involve low-conflict marriages. And research demonstrates that women are far more likely to be abused by their cohabitating boy-

Happy, healthy marriages and families should be on everyone's agenda, and that means we need to talk about divorce reform. One of America's leading politicians has wisely stated: "Divorce has become too easy because of our permissive laws and attitudes. ... Divorce should be much harder [because] children are involved [because] we know that children bear the brunt of failed marriages."

Who said that? Hillary Clinton.

Beverly Willett is an author, lawyer, and co-chair of the Coalition for Divorce Reform. bewillett@beverlywillett.com

Team up with schools for arts education

By Joe Neubauer and Deirdre Connelly

Painting involves chemistry. Sculpture requires an understanding of geometry, gravity, and — in the case of the human form — anatomy. Music is math brought to life.



DARRYL W. MORAN

do more, feel better, and live longer. To achieve this, the company must go beyond the business of medicines. Health begins where we live, learn, work, and play, and our schools play a key role in health.

A solid education in the arts helps children learn how to debate, exchange ideas of seeing, thinking, and perceiving the world around them. We need more inquisitive and creative minds in the workforce. We want multidimensional thinkers pursuing careers in public service.

Successful in companies like ours and to be leaders in our communities. Now that the Barnes Foundation is on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, it can welcome students and teachers at every grade level into its extraordinary new space.

That's why GSK has established this endowment to support K-8 arts education for economically disadvantaged youths in Philadelphia. And we hope other like-minded individuals, foundations, and corporations will help.

Pro forma policing. As an attorney, I can save Inquirer reporters a lot of time on follow-up stories to the latest shooting of a civilian by Philadelphia police.

GSK's mission is to help people when our public servants use 60 years worth of proven, effective engineering solutions on dangerous highways like Roosevelt Boulevard.

There are few things more gratifying than to see a child experience beauty and complexity, and to watch her learn and grow from the experience. This endowment will help ensure that many more children will have that chance.

Joe Neubauer is chairman of the board of trustees of the Barnes Foundation. Deirdre Connelly is director of North America pharmaceuticals, GSK. For more information, visit http://www.barnesfoundation.org/education/k-12/outreach.

Money traps. It's fitting that the proposed speed cameras were featured on the business pages, since the technology exists solely to make money for politicians, camera companies, and auto insurers.

An investigator looks over the car driven by a pizza deliveryman shot and wounded by Philadelphia officers. JOSEPH KACZMAREK / For The Inquirer

Look, can't touch. While marketers "wallowed in luxury" at a Philadelphia University fashion business seminar last week, the security officers who keep students safe wallowed in grim poverty.

need to let elected officials know in no uncertain terms that photo traffic enforcement must be banned. Tom McCarey, Berwyn, tom_mccarey@yahoo.com

Daisy Cruz, SEIU Local 32BJ, Philadelphia

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Lower speeds aren't high-tech

Of all the ways Roosevelt Boulevard could be made safer, a cynic might guess that officials would fixate on the one that promises substantial government revenues and contracts. Hence the push for legislation to allow the state's first speed-enforcement cameras on the deadly dozen thoroughfares.



A memorial to a woman and three the boulevard last summer. DAVID MAIALETTI / Staff

EDITORIAL
Cameras could help make Roosevelt Boulevard safer, but so could many simpler improvements.

Roosevelt Boulevard has drawn renewed attention since a suspected drag racer killed 28-year-old Samara Banks and three of her sons as they tried to cross its broad swaths of asphalt last summer.

missioner Charles Ramsey told a state Senate committee this week. Sen. Mike Stack (D., Phila.) is backing legislation to allow the cameras there and possibly elsewhere in the city and state.

Speed cameras have been widely used in Britain and Australia, as well as in U.S. cities such as Washington. Research shows they can indeed reduce average speeds, and therefore prevent injuries and deaths, if they're deployed with the proper emphasis on safety rather than revenue generation.

But speed cameras could "dramatically change the driving culture" on the boulevard, Philadelphia Police Com-

However, New York officials have managed to dramatically reduce the pedestrian death toll on Queens Boulevard, a similarly dangerous super-streeter traversing dense urban neighborhoods, with improvements such as fencing and signs to discourage jaywalking, highly visible crosswalks, retimed traffic lights, and reduced traffic distances. Philadelphia officials haven't begun to exhaust the simpler safety measures that are well within their existing powers.

Adoptees' rights

St. Paul wrote of adulthood as a time to "put away childish things," look in the mirror, and "know fully, even as I am fully known."

The measure strikes the right balance: It enables adoptees to explore their pasts but preserves birth parents' right to privacy, despite evidence that most won't insist on remaining anonymous.

Fortunately, opening the door to such knowledge won't require divine inspiration. In New Jersey, a single signature will do. Indeed, Gov. Christie should sign an adoption records access bill before him now.

The legislation has wide public support, and critics' claims that it will encourage abortion have not been substantiated. By signing the bill, Christie could further a fundamental conservative goal of minimizing government interference in the lives of families, both adoptive and natural.

YOUR LETTERS

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An investigator looks over the car driven by a pizza deliveryman shot and wounded by Philadelphia officers. JOSEPH KACZMAREK / For The Inquirer

Look, can't touch

While marketers "wallowed in luxury" at a Philadelphia University fashion business seminar last week, the security officers who keep students safe wallowed in grim poverty ("Looking at luxury," April 16). Those underpaid security officers will never own Gucci. In fact, they may not be able to put food on the table.

Higher standards

As for team owner Joshua Harris' claim of a successful 76ers season, fleeing fans to watch a 19-win team might be a success in New York. Here, not so much ("Sixers owner ties a nice bow on a 19-win season," April 19).

Lonegan's example

Republican congressional candidate Steve Lonegan just made his tax returns available, and his opponent, Tom MacArthur, should join Lonegan in setting a tone of openness, transparency, and honesty in this campaign.

Bookworms needed

Clark DeLeon should give his students assignments that would require them to visit a library ("Cultural divide between teacher/pupils," April 20). They would meet library professionals trained to teach them how to use electronic as well as print resources, and to distinguish good information from bad. Libraries have always served as education centers, and they appear to be needed now more than ever.



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