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Social policy constraints on differing political ideological fronts.

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Abstract

This paper discusses social welfare policy constraints in the light of different political debates that confront American public policy space. The paper utilizes the concept of *policy drift* to figure out deficiencies in the implementation of Affordable Care Act, means-tested government programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Earned Income Tax Credit, to mention but a few. On the educational front, the paper examines the opposition to Common Core program by revisiting the conservative and liberal viewpoints on universal application. The paper is spiced with a biblical model of government and statesmanship as a *sine qua non* for good governance, to tackle policy issues of family life, public morality and affirmative action. This paper concludes that we can hardly find a common ground in the adequacy of the social welfare program that will be all encompassing to serve the needs of the society, to fulfil the aspirations of different political ideological fronts. The paper suggests an inclination to Christian statesmanship as a panacea.

Key Words: Public Policy; Social Policy; Policy drift; Christian Statesmanship; New Christian Right.

Introduction

The underpinning elements of social policy implementation derives from government's fiscal stance. Social policy formulation draws from government policies in eradicating poverty through the social security program, healthcare delivery and management, and education assessment and implementation,¹ to mention but a few. The dialogue between different ideological fronts make a difference in the understanding of various policies affecting the sectors. On the left the democrats confront issues from a liberal standpoint and on the right the republicans take a conservative position to create the much-needed balance for a democratic union.² However, the social policy of the United States government is often limited and driven by executive and legislative consensus, which does not come by easily. Amongst the legislature there is always a debate on which side of the aisle will carry the day. This often slows down the process of policy making and implementation, because social policies spring from laws made by the legislature and in some cases executive orders signed by the President for execution by government agencies (Brady and Bostic, 2015). This paper will discuss the key areas and debates in the current social policy arena, evaluate the major flaws in government social policy from the 1960's onward and lastly evaluate the issues with a Biblical model of government and statesmanship.

The current social policy arena in the United States is driven by debates on the framework for public health care delivery, which is affordable, efficient and timely. However, in the midst of the controversy the prevailing Affordable Care Act (ACA), passed by a democratic led congress under the Obama Administration in 2010 has been stripped of its strengths by Republicans under Donald Trump as President. The issue of health care has been very controversial since the 1930's when the social security act was enacted into law. Many argue that health care should be universal as exemplified in some advanced economies like Canada and United Kingdom, and some argue that it can only be affordable if everyone pays a fair share for service delivery (Gingrich and Ansell 2012, Brady and Bostic 2015, and Stoltzfus-Jost, 2017). No matter which side of the debate one finds himself the underlining fact

¹ Brasfield, James M. "Medicare's future: Policy ideas and the coming Reform debate." *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration*; Harrisburg 37(4) (Spring 2015) 462-517.

² Stoltzfus Jost, Timothy. "The Morality of Health Care Reform: Liberal and Conservative Views and the Space between them." *The Hastings Center Report*; *Hastings -on-Hudson*. 47(6), (October 12, 2017). 9-13

remains that affordable health care should drive the economy of the United States in the 21st century.

In the same vein the social welfare policy suffers considerable constraints from the vagaries of ideological stance. While liberals believe that every American should enjoy a better life irrespective of social standing, the conservatives posit that an individual can only enjoy a better life to the limit of his work and effort. This varying ideological configuration has driven the concept of social welfare policy since inception. This paper is presented in five sections, the second section reviews some of the policy debates and also discuss the conditions for a comprehensive all-encompassing social security policy that would at the same time retain the American values of hard work. In order to examine the flaws in the social policy framework, we shall discuss the implications of a “policy drift” as espoused by Hacker et al. (2013) in the third section; following developments in the last two decades on how research has conceptualized the changes in the welfare policies of the United States. This paper enlivens the discussion of social policy with a biblical model of government and statesmanship in the fourth section, and the fifth section concludes.

Key areas and debates in the current social policy arena

The crux of the social welfare policy is to provide social protection for the population considered to be poor.³ The definition of poverty is relative, and classification is based on ideological leaning relating to both spatial and temporal dimensions. According to Cochran et al. (2016), the liberal view is that the various characteristics of the economy are to blame for poverty; the conservative view is that the poor themselves are to blame for their own condition; and the radical view is that the fundamental nature of our capitalist system keeps poverty thriving. Historical moments determine the extent to which more evidence exists for one view or the other. Over time, collectively we have changed our view of who is deserving of assistance or not, related at least in part to the state of the economy. A popular determinant of recipients of assistance is the concept of “universalism,” which is broadly defined by Brady and Bostic (2015) as homogeneity across the population in benefits, coverage, and eligibility.

³ Sykes, Jennifer; Katrin Kriz, Kathryn Edin and Sarah Halpern-Meekin. “Dignity and Dreams: What the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Means to Low -Income Families.” *American Sociological Review* 80(2) (April 2015). 243-267

However, Korpi and Palme (1998) argue that earnings related benefits have greater homogeneity than do targeted benefits, because earnings-related programs distribute something to nearly everyone. In a high employment situation, earnings-related benefits have relatively broad coverage and relatively open eligibility. Nevertheless, all this leads to transfer homogeneity. Similar to transfer share, universalism implies that all are equal stakeholders and constituencies of beneficiaries, who have an interest and normative belief in maintaining social policies (Pierson 2004). Because universalism implies greater homogeneity in the probability of receiving transfers, welfare transfers should have more broadly shared support (Beramendi and Rehm 2011; Gingrich and Ansell 2012). Larsen (2008) argues that universalism suppresses public discussion of the neediness, deservingness, otherness, and worthiness of beneficiaries, and many researchers argue that universalism lessens the stigma of being a recipient (Katz 2001). Therefore, universalism should be positively related to redistribution preferences.

Nevertheless, the United States social welfare policy challenges have been counterintuitive and as Murray (2015) stated, it provides an “incentive to fail.” In the minority communities the welfare policy almost failed to deliver the proposed incentives for a better life and society. Liberals emphasize that the opportunities given to the poor must be tangible like job training for salable skills, not temporary menial jobs or work with no future. Unlike conservatives, liberals and progressives promote the idea that there are external forces that inhibit the poor from making progress – because they lack opportunities for education and employment due to discrimination. Cochran et al. (2016) opine that according to liberal theory, racial discrimination against blacks, Hispanics and other minorities and sex discrimination against women are important causes of poverty among these groups. Conservatives however, argue that the economy provides plenty of opportunities for those who wish to work or achieve their potentials, by taking advantage of the free enterprise opportunities that the economy of the United States provides. In the same vein they propose that the beneficiaries of the social insurance program and private philanthropy should serve those unable to work due to age, physical handicap, or other disability. Conservative view is that healthy adults unwilling to work due to laziness or lack of self-discipline, undermine the growth of a positive society with good moral standing.⁴ Rather such lazy attitude to work encourage a culture of poverty that brews indolence, instant gratification, teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse and social

⁴ Greve, Bent. “Introduction – Obamacare – Implications for Social Policy and Administration in the United States.” *Social Policy and Administration* 50(4). (July 2016). 425-427.

vices, detrimental to social progress. The Religious right in the same vein condemns the profligacy exercised in the abuse of the social welfare program such as family break-up, unwed pregnancy as major causes of poverty.⁵

Conservatives argue that the future of the welfare program is doomed because of abuse, the program cannot prevent poverty. They claim the social welfare program is marred with cheating and fraud; for example, the “welfare queen” analogy espoused by President Reagan in 1984.⁶ However, radicals on the left agree with the liberals that unemployment amongst blacks and other minorities is rooted in discrimination, and that the fabric of the American society is skewed in favor of the white population. They further argue that poverty is inevitable in a capitalist society like the United States – adopting the classical Marxist perspective of the poor working for the upper class (Brasfield, 2015).

At almost 50 years old Medicare has still not undergone significant changes. The program remains fundamentally very similar to what began in July 1966. The Medicare policy paradigm retains strong support from both the public and policy elites, but an alternative paradigm has developed over the past two decades. These two competing views of Medicare are strongly related to partisan preference. The public polls on the topic since 1995 have consistently shown opposition to major change but identified a significant minority who support the consumer choice perspective and endorse the premium support idea. (Kaiser Public Opinion, 2012) Even a casual observer of Medicare policy may observe that additional policy ideas have not been addressed here. Many argue that the age of Medicare eligibility, 65, ought to be increased to 67 or even 70 to reflect increased longevity over the last five decades.⁷ From the very beginning the Medicare benefit structure has been inadequate. Most beneficiaries need to purchase supplemental insurance to protect themselves against high deductibles and co-insurance, as well as catastrophic costs. Long-term institutional care for the chronically ill

⁵ Midgley, James. “The New Christian Right, Social Policy and the Welfare State.” *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*. 17(2). (June 1990). 89-106

⁶ The story of Linda Taylor, a woman from Chicago who defrauded the social security administration in the 1970’s to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars, using various identities, as told by President Reagan in his 1984 campaign speech. Although, he never mentioned the “welfare queen” by name, the message was very clear to his audience.

⁷ Brasfield, James M. ... *ibid* (Spring 2015)

Medicare beneficiary is not covered. Each of these and other elements of Medicare pose serious threat to the success of the social security program.

The central policy paradigm, program sustainability, and cost containment strategies were selected here as the major policy ideas surrounding the health care program. There was considerable increase in government expenditure with the introduction of a federal health legislation in the 1960's. The Medicaid and Medicare program were enacted into law in 1965 and since then have expanded to reach a growing number of Americans at the point of their healthcare needs. In 2010 a major reform in the health care delivery system came on stream by the passage of Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), popularly referred to as Obamacare. Despite the controversy surrounding the passage of this Bill through congress, the aftermath of the Supreme Court ruling on the matters arising indicate that health care policy of the United States is still bound with this piece of legislation. The underlining discussion is rooted on the principle of universalism. Some argue that health care should be universal and equally accessible by everyone irrespective of social standing.⁸ This position is primarily taken by left wing ideologues, but on the other side of the discussion are right wing conservatives who believe that the American constitution does not in any way recognize the right to the public distribution of economic goods, be it food, clothing and health care. They propose a healthcare for those who could not afford to be given by churches, and other philanthropic organizations.⁹ They also argue strongly that a government mandate on health care insurance provision is interference in the private business of the health care industry stakeholders.¹⁰ In the wake of the controversy surrounding the passage of ACA in 2010, congress rejected the single payer option, and after many overtures they finally arrived at a combination of employer mandate and the individual mandate (Greve, 2016).

In the preceding decade managed care and use of market competition to reduce health care spending growth had been the mantra for corporations newly worried about the impact of

⁸ Hacker, J., Thelen, K. and Pierson, P. Drift and Conversion: Hidden Faces of Institutional Change, Paper given at American Political Science Association 2013 Annual Meeting, Chicago United States. 2013.

⁹ Beland, D. and Waddan A. "The Obama presidency and health insurance reform: Assessing continuity and change," *Social Policy & Society*, 11(3), (2012), 319-330

¹⁰ Beland, Daniel, Phillip Rocco and Alex Waddan. "Reassessing Policy Drift: Social Policy Change in the United States." *Social Policy & Administration*. 50(2), (March 2016), 201-218.

employee health insurance costs. Republicans in Congress saw this as a viable idea to change Medicare as the costs were reduced. A 1995 issue of Health Affairs featured Medicare policy scholars of various political persuasions discussing how Medicare might be transformed from a social insurance system to one that essentially provides a voucher to Medicare recipients to use in purchasing a private insurance plan. It came to be called a “premium support” approach because the idea envisioned a major subsidy by the federal government to make the premium affordable (Medicare and Market Change, 1995). In 1995 the Republican proposal to make this change in Medicare failed to become law when President Clinton chose to let the federal government shut down rather than sign the bill. In this showdown the President ultimately prevailed, although the subsequent compromise legislation created more private plan options for Medicare recipients under the expanded Medicare + Choice option. A few years later the Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare came one vote short of recommending a premium support system near the end of the Clinton Administration. (Oberlander, 2003)

On many health care issues, there is broad consensus across most of the ideological spectrum. Everyone is against disease. When President Trump tried to cut funding for the National Institutes of Health, he faced determined opposition from both parties. Both parties believe we need the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control, although they differ on funding levels and how regulatory the agencies should be. Virtually everyone is in favor of value-based payments for health care services, though they may disagree as to what this approach means. Everyone is opposed to fraud and abuse. A surprising number of pieces of health legislation pass with overwhelming support in both houses of Congress (Stoltzfus-Jost, 2017). There is no doubt that a major piece of social policy legislation is health care and education and the most targeted beneficiaries are the poor and the less privileged. As Murray (2015) would put it, everyone who work near the minimum wage find welfare alternative attractive. It supports the labor force participation of younger workers because their wages are more likely to be near minimum.

There is a strong, but guided conflict in the policy stance of the educational system of the United States. Cochran et al. (2016) observe the conflicting thoughts of Liberals and Conservatives in the policy formulation of the American educational system. While conservatives attribute personal differences in educational achievement to individual initiative and efforts, liberals contend that there is societal inequity that is skewed in favor of the white majority that hinders the opportunity of minorities to attain their desired goals in education.

Albeit, these two traditional ideological opposition generates conflicting goals in American educational policy. For instance, the controversy on financial equalization reflects the conviction that expenditures affect quality of education. Although the relationship between expenditures and educational achievement remains unclear. There is a general assumption that deprived students achieve less with lower incomes and difficulty advancing through the economic and social ladder. However, there is no empirical evidence to show that expenditures do affect the educational attainment, but it is generally accepted that it improves opportunities for broad intellectual development.¹¹ Over the years, government efforts have been shaped by civil rights and social activism towards attaining equality in access; the affirmative action program of the 1960's tend to stem the issue, but the constraints are still rife especially amongst the minority ethnic groups. The rules might seem fair, but there are underlining barriers that limit the potentials of the minority.¹² The notion of these barriers might seem far-fetched for the inner-city youth who is overshadowed by primordial sentiments, which Murray (2015) considers to be insularity – isolation from mainstream society, the expectation of failure leading to lack of self-confidence, and the official sanction to reject personal responsibility for one's action. Educational attainment and economic progress for the young black kid will now require an extra push to see self beyond these constraints.

The major flaws in government social policy from the 1960's onward

To evaluate the flaws in government social policy since the 1960's in line with policy formulation and implementation, there is a need to discuss the problems and constraints facing the various agencies responsible for the implementation of these policies. It is noteworthy to mention that a bulk of what is considered to be flaws arise from policy misalignment and ideological differences, which often result in delays in implementation and oftentimes lead to non-implementation.¹³ For instance, congressional disagreements often lead to sequestration – limited government funding or outright refusal to fund the implementation of a policy. Major

¹¹ Gingrich, Jane and Ben Ansell. "Preferences in Context: Micro Preferences, Macro Preferences, Macro Contexts, and the Demand for Social Policy." *Comparative Political Studies* 45(12): (2012), 1624-54

¹² Katz, Michael B. *The Price of Citizenship: Redefining the American Welfare states*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001.

¹³ Beramendi, Pablo and Philipp Rehm. "Who Gives, Who Gains? Progressivity and Preferences." Midwest Political Science Association Meetings, March 31 to April 2011, Chicago IL.

flaws in social policy spring from *policy drift* – according to Beland, Rocco and Waddan (2016) if policy drift is to be a meaningful concept, there must be technically-feasible policy solutions available to remedy the consequences of changed economic or social conditions. If the changes in the socio-economic context yield no alternatives, then the norms of political life do not apply. By contrast, policies drift when policymakers fail to use available options to deal with external changes, such as increasing the minimum wage or subsidizing access to childcare for working parents.¹⁴ The availability of options is relevant because it means that it is a matter of political contestation whether these policy choices are made. Drift, therefore, is not simply a result of a dearth of policy ideas, but the consequence of a drive to maintain the legislative status quo, even though it is apparent that this does not mean the reality on the ground is that ‘things remain the same’ (Hacker et al. 2013).

As Rocco and Thurston (2014) argue, the utility of drift as a concept depends on surmounting numerous challenges to empirical analysis. Three particularly important challenges merit special attention. First, systematically identifying a set of processes as drift is in itself challenging, in part because drift is, as Hacker (2004) acknowledges, a ‘subterranean’ reality largely hidden from view, which means that there is not always a ‘smoking gun’ that explains the motives of those opposed to revising policy to meet changing circumstance. This invisibility is related to two main factors. On one hand, the typically slow-moving changes in the economic and social context that help produce drift are not always immediately apparent. On the other hand, the other source of drift – policy inaction on the part of government to address such changes – is not a presence but an absence, making it harder to observe and operationalize empirically. A related issue is that drift is not always easy to measure or quantify, which poses a significant methodological challenge. For instance, the 2008 financial crisis and the ensuing recession triggered a major socio-economic change which affected social policy in the fields of health insurance and retirement security (Beland and Waddan, 2012). In fact, President Bush’s failed 2005 attempt to privatize Social Security further points to the importance of drift as a concept because, in this case, the absence of formal revision is not the whole story about pension change in the United States. At the same time, revisiting the situation of United States health insurance in relationship to the issue of policy drift is especially useful in tackling the potential relationship between drift, revision, and implementation. This is the

¹⁴ Larsen, Christian Albrekt. “The Institutional Logic of Welfare Attitudes.” *Comparative Political Studies* 41(2): 2008. 145-68.

case because the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), a complex and major health reform, will take nearly a long time to unfold and will require the co-operation of numerous potential actors, including state governors and legislative branches (Béland *et al.* 2014). As a result, the potential impact of the ACA on policy is largely mediated by a long and politically fragmented implementation process, a situation that should highlight the importance of implementation for the analysis of drift. The resistance to the implementation of the ACA was manifested across a number of aspects of the law. For example, in order to enable lower income households to purchase affordable health insurance, the ACA established so-called ‘health insurance exchanges’ through which people would be able to choose from a variety of insurance packages and, depending on their income, receive a subsidy from the federal government to pay for that insurance.¹⁵ The law stipulated that state governments could establish their own exchange, and that the federal government would act in cases where states did not co-operate. When the law was passed it was anticipated that most states would take the opportunity to run their own exchanges (Jacobs and Skocpol 2010), but by the end of 2014 only 24 states were doing so (Kaiser Family Foundation 2015). The federal government did step in elsewhere, so people who were eligible for subsidies were able to access them, but the uncooperative attitude of many Republican controlled states was indicative of an ongoing resistance to the implementation of the ACA (Béland *et al.* 2016).

The significance of that resistance, and the manner in which it worked to limit the ACA’s aims of reversing the impact of policy drift, was seen in its most quantifiable form with regard to the ACA’s proposed expansion of the Medicaid system. The ACA intended that all states would be effectively required to expand their existing Medicaid programs to cover everyone with an income up to 138 per cent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In the summer of 2012, however, the Supreme Court ruled that the ACA represented an over-reach of federal authority and allowed states the option of not expanding their program (Waddan 2013).

Another concept of government policy misalignment and misspecification is in the means-tested government programs, which many believe can stigmatize their beneficiaries, and also carry social and psychological costs alongside their economic benefits (Edin and Lein 1997; Rogers-Dillon 1995; Rosier and Corsaro 1993). Temporary Assistance for Needy

¹⁵ Rocco, P. and Thurston, C. “From metaphors to measures: Observable indicators of gradual institutional change,” *Journal of Public Policy*, 34(1). 2014. 35-62.

Families (TANF), the core welfare program in the United States, has this effect (Stuber and Kronebusch 2004; Stuber and Schlesinger 2006). However, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is one relatively generous, wide-reaching, means-tested government program that instead creates a feeling of social inclusion, in part by fueling recipients' hopes and plans for future upward mobility. EITC is a refundable tax credit for lower-income workers, which now lifts more children out of poverty than any government program (Greenstein 2005; Greenstein and Shapiro 1998; Holt 2011). The way the EITC is targeted and distributed imbues this money with a social meaning: namely, a just reward for work, and opportunity for upward mobility, and a chance to provide recipients children with some of their "wants" and not just their "needs." Proponents argue that the EITC serves the purpose by reducing the stigma since it is delivered to recipients through the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and not social welfare office, second the recipients are citizens, who earn a living through work. To this end, EITC is not a stigmatized means-tested program, which creates social exclusion.

On the education front we observe a strong opposition on the universal application of the common core. Opposition to the Common Core is derived from two diverse groups. Conservatives are concerned about the uniform social and political values that may be incorporated into the initiative's lessons. Many of these values concerning family relationships, the role of government, and social standards are in conflict with traditional values of conservatives (Murray, 2015). Conservatives, liberals, and educational professionals have challenged the Common Core for other reasons as well. First, the emphasis on standards seems to require all teachers to use the same instructional approach with all students, regardless of learning level. Creativity, diversity, and flexibility of instructional technique (especially valued by educational professionals) seem to be discouraged with the emphasis on universal standards. The standards also assume that all students can and will master the same material within the same time period. This assumption ignores differences in student ability (Cochran et al. 2016). A second reason for opposition is that the emphasis on standards requires an ever-expanding testing mechanism that will be used to measure both student learning and teacher effectiveness. On the other hand, matters arising from affirmative action policy such as reverse discrimination amount to a major flaw in education and employment inequity.¹⁶

¹⁶ Katz, Michael B. *The Price of Citizenship: Redefining the American Welfare states*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001.

Since the War on Poverty was declared in 1964 by the Johnson administration, official poverty reports show little reduction in poverty, this measure has serious conceptual flaws that make it an inaccurate indicator of material hardship.¹⁷ While material hardship has fallen dramatically, it did not happen because of the war on poverty. As a whole our poverty programs have not focused enough on transitioning their recipients out of poverty via pro-work incentives, but rather our policies are failing to strengthen self-sufficiency.¹⁸ In that regard, the war on poverty has not been a success. A larger portion of non-disabled working-age adults receive welfare benefits each year, and growth in work has been stunted for this group, especially among men. This suggests we should renew our focus on self-sufficiency in welfare programs via expanding work requirements. Are work requirements simply a means to “punish the poor” as some suggest? It is universally accepted among economists that welfare programs that provide material benefits to low-income households create a perverse incentive to not work.¹⁹ The logic is that as you increase your earnings from work, you lose a portion of your benefits. Of course, whether work requirements have net benefits depend on how well they are designed. We note the importance of providing work supports when necessary and exempting some non-disabled working-age recipients for various reasons. But to claim that well-designed work requirements “punish the poor” is not supported by the evidence.²⁰ Ultimately, people living in poverty and taxpayers funding welfare programs deserve a policy response rooted in truth and punditry.

Biblical model of government and statesmanship regarding social policy

The New Christian Right has taken positions on a variety of social policy issues including family life, public morality, affirmative action, and education (Midgley 1990). Numerous arguments have been formulated in support of its stance but generally, its approach is inspired

¹⁷ Brady, David and Amie Bostic. “Paradoxes of Social Policy: Welfare Transfers, Relative Poverty, and Redistribution Preferences.” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 80; No. 2 (April 2015) 268-298

¹⁸ Beland, Daniel, Phillip Rocco and Alex Waddan. “Reassessing Policy Drift: Social Policy Change in the United States.” *Social Policy & Administration*. 50(2), (March 2016), 201-218.

¹⁹ Larsen, Christian Albrekt. “The Institutional Logic of Welfare Attitudes.” *Comparative Political Studies* 41(2): 2008. 145-68.

²⁰ Brady, David and Amie Bostic. “Paradoxes of Social Policy: Welfare Transfers, Relative Poverty, and Redistribution Preferences.” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 80; No. 2 (April 2015) 268-298

by an antipathy to modernism and 'liberal' tendencies in civil society. deeply conservative, the movement has opposed progressivist social changes which contradict folkways that are believed to be inspired by scriptural teachings. Drawing on these traditionalist beliefs, several fundamentalist leaders have expressed their opposition to governmental welfare programs, and some have characterized the welfare state as anti- scriptural. In this interpretation, state welfare programs are regarded as anti-Christian because they are inconsistent with traditional American individualist values which became institutionalized not because of an accident of history, or because a particular sociology reality on the frontier, but because of divine inspiration. Since, as Jorstad (1987) argued, it is God who is the "author of liberty" and "whose thoughts are the ideology of freedom and democracy", the American capitalist ethic and its anti-statism reflects God's purpose. The welfare state is contrary to Christian belief because it negates scriptural teachings that "support our American system of freedom, private enterprise, individual initiative, personal responsibility, competition and what we call the capitalist system" (Jorstad, 1987:26).

In a caring and just society government must have a role to play; that our values, our love, and our charity must find expression not just in our government and in our politics. The speeches of Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan provide an instructive contrast regarding the relationship between the Bible and public policy, especially since both presidents have been closely associated with Christian groups.²¹ In the scriptures the golden thread that links humanity to the divine is God's immeasurable love for His children, manifested through His care for their basic needs, such as food and shelter. In Numbers 35:11, God made special provisions for those fleeing because of having committed unpremeditated crimes by establishing a city of refuge. In this provision, God cared for social issues, such as how to treat the homeless, the strangers, or the poor in the community. According to Fischer (1998), true statesmanship requires that a leader should walk in the path of the truth with absolute fear and respect for God, knowing that divine Grace and wisdom comes from God.

²¹ Midgley, James. "The New Christian Right, Social Policy and the Welfare State." *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*. 17(2). (June 1990). 89-106

Conclusion

In this paper we have discussed the American social welfare policy drawing from the legislative debates and the implications on government policy in recent years. Since the radical reform of the War on Poverty by Lyndon Johnson in the 1960's we have seen that the United States government has taken various steps to support the less privileged and if possible provide a universal social welfare package that would address the needs of the poor. However, despite all the expenditure in the social welfare program there is no indication that it has actually lifted those targeted from poverty. Rather the results show that the incidence of poverty is still on the rise. The social welfare program has only provided an incentive for unwed pregnancies, breaking up families because of perceived social protection even out of wedlock. In the same vein, health reform has not been universal. The United States is still battling with trying to figure out an adequate and affordable health care policy that is universal and at the same time protect the industry. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) with all its comprehensive protection of preexisting conditions is still being challenged by conservatives as a government overreach on the affairs of the citizens.

Nonetheless, the crux of the matter is that we can hardly find a common ground in the adequacy of a social welfare program that will be all encompassing to address the needs of the American society given the ideological divide that exists between the liberal left-wing democrats and the right-wing conservative republicans. These differences account for the reason why there are unusual government shutdown and sequestration to bar the funding of certain programs that are not in the interest of the ruling party. Above all, this paper informs us of the need to seek God's provision as he commands us to take care of the homeless, the poor in our society. It is only through a compassionate reach to the needy that a true statesman could be seen to administer a government to the fulfilment of Biblical injunction.

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