

From: Beverley Smith
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The disconnect budgets have- Summer 2011

submission to Standing Committee on Finance

Finance departments study labor force statistics, gross domestic product, productivity, employment rates, market trends, investment stats. The Income Tax Act is designed predicting that a fair tax system will motivate certain behaviors, creating incentives good for the economy, and yet there is a disconnect.

Something is missing.

People don't always act in their own self interest. If we assume they did we'd have very clear charts but there is a whole other element motivating people's behavior, one beyond clear reason. Are they crazy also, on the side? Not at all. Do they need calming and instruction? Not really. The other powerful force that influences most of what they do is not money, but desire for something way less tactile, way less countable. It is not in the charts at all. And so predictions of behavior are always a bit off, trends elude accountants. Something highly relevant to the discussion, what science would call a key variable in the experiment, is not being noticed.

If it were the taking of drug, we'd notice. If it were consumption of a costly product we'd notice. We might even, noticing it huge effect on behavior, try to harness it. If it is a force for good for the economy, so powerful it overrides reason, we'd for sure want to grab it, force-feed it if necessary to taxpayers. Yet for decades we have just pretended it did not play a role. We have gone on with our pie graphs blind to it.

That powerful force is emotion. We are all in awe of the way that a person who has lost a loved one collapses in grief, can't work, can't eat, can't think.. The way a renowned athlete can crumble before our eyes when his marriage is on the rocks. We are reminded when children raised without nearness to anyone who loves them, go wandering and get into trouble with drugs, drinking, gangs. Yet economists are only able to tally results, not cause, symptoms not roots.

And so we tend to get the bandaid treatments, laws to control drug use or alcohol, harsher punishment for criminals. We get the well intentioned policies to maybe reduce poverty and get

more people earning, as if that will fix everything. Sadly, it will not.

Poverty is defined by economists as lack of money but there is also poverty of feeling valued. Officialdom defines bad care and abuse, causing visible harm that can be photographed. But there is little attention to neglect, to what is lacking in attention.

The dilemma between reason and passion has long been discussed in poetry but rarely has an impact on public policy. Why would it? It is so vague, so frothy, so sentimental and gushy. Bureaucracy shuns such issues and prefers the hard facts of spread sheets.

In much of the western world today we are seeing huge economic crisis, the debt load nearly overpowering the US, one of the world's strongest nations. What went wrong?

I submit that we all have been ignoring the same thing, focused only on the flow of money to make a society prosper, and we ignored the same thing - that other factor. We tied the money of all taxpayers, pension plans, even house mortgages, to the roller coaster of the stock market and we all were made gamblers. To protect a system of such economic promise we fought wars, to ensure others could live as we live. We became obese on our fast food culture, too busy to cook a meal, too wound up in New York minutes to have time for our downtime. There was none.

We created economic plans so tilted that the state only counted and valued, in fact only noticed when we were paid money. Outside of that role we were invisible. When bills got high we were told to ramp up our earning time, work for longer hours and for longer years, retiring later or only partly. Any nonearning interval was deemed useless to the world.

And that is how bad it got in the ignorance of this other factor. And so as people burned out and got back to paid work on anxiety and depression medication in record numbers, we kept the public toting that barge and lifting that bale. People were praised for their long hours of paid work, rewarded with tax breaks, promoted for more status. If a job did not pay much, hey that was OK because it still was a job. Government would even go into the red to pay for childcare for a woman so she could earn way less than the childcare cost the state. The point was to keep her earning. Money was the goal.

And as kids developed lots of anxiety and depression disorders of their own, conditions doctors were now calling attachment disorders, failure to have linked up with a significant adult in their lives, we still sailed on with one tunnel vision, giving more blame for the disorders and more medication. Even as we tried to help those off the wagon of paid labor get back on, it was costing us a lot but there was no theory at all that being on another track might have any value at all.

And in that we erred. People were becoming distressed and unproductive when they were not allowed a life outside the office. The 'balance' between home and office got recognized, was called the work-family 'conflict' as if they two were at odds and one had to be vanquished. The state clearly wanted the office commitment to win.

But it ignored human nature and the hints of our medical stats, our kids' crises, and the voices of literature even for centuries. The factor that no one dared name was the other powerful motivator of human behavior- love.

Is that laughable? It is cheesy to discuss it and completely of course seems out of syn with high economics. And yet it is a key reason for decisions people make about career, housing, family, purchases, health, retirement. The heart has its reasons and reason does not always even know them as French philosopher Blaise Pascal said in the 1600s. How long will it take us before we factor that in?

If you do a quick survey of this other factor you discover some stunning facts. This thing we've been ignoring changes lives. Many writers have even said it is the most important factor in life, outweighing even career, money, even health.

It makes people better people. It takes them out of their shell and makes them interested in the wellbeing of someone else. That is good for the social fabric.

It makes them happy in a buoyant general way that leads to generosity and this is good for the community.

It makes them dream of a future with hope. It helps them believe that they can make a difference and build a better world and they want to, because now there is someone else they are providing for, taking care of, someone they love. So it is a huge factor in political and social activism.

It makes people feel better about who they are. It empowers them, removes hurts, makes them resilient to hardship, ennobles them. This reduces costs of medical care and lost time from paid work due to depression. It nurtures the creative side, the overflowing of joy to express love of life through music and the arts. It makes people celebrate beauty in nature and want to preserve clean air and water, good parks and safe industry.

We would all want to harness this thing and make sure every voter, every taxpayer, every future taxpayer got this thing for it does so much good in the world. Yet we can't capture it. It is elusive, comes unbidden. It is an enigma, And yet the people dream of it, want it, will travel through blizzards for it, pursue careers for it or give up on careers for it.

It is love.

And a fair society, a wise government, a prudent finance department would be aware of this factor and respectful of the huge role it is playing whether tallied correctly or not. A fair tax policy and social policy would allow for this factor, would try to nurture it. Where there is love it would bend over backwards to make sure it could thrive.

Where two people wanted to have a life together, to invest in their own futures together, it would tax them to respect that leap of faith, that trust. It would give them for instance, the option of income splitting to value however they chose to share their income. It would give them legal protections to respect their sharing of love, their property rights, their inheritance rights, their child access and hospital visit rights. It would recognize the love they share, legally, so that they could benefit from that huge support only such love can give.

A fair government cannot create love but it would do whatever it could to sow the seeds so love could grow. It would respect those who want to share their love and create children, who dare to commit to raising these children for 20 years, come what may, and to love them and stand by them. It would recognize that those who make the decision to share their love deserve time with each other to let it grow. It would create a birth bonus, a universal funding for children till age 18, and a preference wherever possible for those who love each other to take care of each other.

It would provide the tax climate for this - a funding per child that flows with the child so family can set up the loving care arrangements that their child needs. It would not prefer, would definitely not fund by preference, care that was outside of that loving dimension, care by strangers or a sea of changing faces.

It would fund the health care needs of citizens so wherever possible they could take care of each other, with tax breaks for caregivers, funding for frail elderly that flowed with them to wherever they were.

It would provide where people are in crisis, a first resource of more contact with those who love each other. Instead of whisking children away from families in poverty or crisis, it would work with families to enable them to thrive again, together wherever possible. The first priority would be to follow the love.

When teens run away, when gangs form, when drug addiction takes a hold, the first reaction of the state would be to go back to where the person felt loved, to try to retrieve some sense of worth again and build on it.

These ideas are not traditional economics but traditional economics has failed us. It turned a blind eye to a basic fact of human nature. We thrive only on love.

If government, however, on purpose removes the love, fails to nurture the bond that could exist and thrusts children into care by strangers, thrusts troubled teens away from their circle of elders and nurturers, it creates not just neutrality but harm.

Love denied, love lost, has also a stunning power to harm. People become lost to society and their own potential, become self-destructive and sometimes other-destructive, if they are not able to be with those they love. Seniors languish in nursing homes. Homeless teens feel abandoned.

We cannot brag to the world that our economy is best, most productive, fastest growing, least in

debt if we are letting this seamy truth exist without addressing it. We are a sham.

We must factor love into our economics policies and it is not for those who lack love only. We actually must do it also for ourselves.

Here is some wisdom from writers of the past and present about this huge power love has to affect the very fabric of our economy.:

Quotes about Love -re the cause

basic meaning of life

Love is space and time made directly perceptible to the heart- Proust

We do not live in accordance with our mode of thinking, but we think in accordance with our mode of loving- Rozinov

The language of friendship is not words but meanings- Thoreau

I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach - Elizabeth Barrett Browning

It is love, not reason, that is stronger than death- Thomas Mann

There is only one happiness in life- to love and be loved- George Sand

It is good that men should think but it is indispensable that they should love -Bernard J. Bell

Only love lasts forever- Pope John Paul II

Love is as strong as death- Bible- Song of Solomon

He who loves not, lives not - Ramon Lull

There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning- Thornton Wilder

primary motivator that is not the same as interest in money- the idea that if we only predict behavior based on financial self-interest we ignore other main motivators

For love nor money

It is impossible to love and be wise - Francis Bacon

A jug of wine, a loaf of bread and thou, beside me, singing in the wilderness. Oh Wilderness were paradise now - Edward Fitzgerald

Love is the wisdom of the fool and the folly of the wise - Samuel Johnson

Love is an endless mystery for it has nothing else to explain it- Rabindranath Tagore

Love is the triumph of imagination over intelligence- H. L. Mencken

As soon as you cannot keep anything from a woman, you love her - Paul. Gerdyl

Love is not a delirium but it has many points in common therewith- Carlyle

The supreme happiness of life is the conviction of being loved for yourself, or, more correctly, being loved in spite of yourself- Victor Hugo

makes a person socially responsible

Love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking together in the same direction - Saint-Exupery

With the generosity of a great lord, the happy lover smiles upon everything about him - Ortega y Gasset

One would be in less danger from the wiles of a stranger
If one's own kin and kith were more fun to be with - Nash

You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving- Amy Carmichael

Love is not something you feel. It is something you do - David Wilkerson

Love cures people, both the ones who receive it and the ones who give it- Carl Menninger

makes a person other-centred

When family pride ceases to act, individual selfishness comes into play - Tocqueville

Love is the most terrible and also the most generous of the passions. It is the only one which includes in its dreams the happiness of someone else - Alphonse Karr

Love is that condition in which the happiness of another person is essential to your own- Robert Heinlein

Love seeks one thing only: the good of the one loved - Thomas Merton

Love is the only spiritual power that can overcome the self-centredness that is inherent in being alive- Arnold Toynbee

makes a person able to endure life's hardships without becoming violent

One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life. That word is love- Sophocles

Love conquers all things- Virgil

When love is strong, a man and woman can make their bed on a sword's blade- Talmud

A man loved by a beautiful woman will always get out of trouble- Voltaire

Love is a crutch, that's all, and there isn't one of us doesn't need a crutch -Norman Mailer

brings out the best in us

All of us are better when we're loved- Alistair MacLeod

You complete me- Movie "Ghost"

I love you not only for what you are but for who I am when I am with you -Roy Croft

There is no surprise more wonderful than the surprise of being loved - Charles Morgan

We are shaped and fashioned by what we love - Goethe

Tell me whom you love and I will tell you what you are - Arsene Houssaye

Love is a great beautifier - Louisa May Alcott

There can be no happiness equal to the happiness of finding a heart that understands

Love is the key to the entire therapeutic program of the modern psychiatric hospital - Karl Menninger

makes a person invested in the future turning out OK for the world

love is a bet on security and stability. It is hope in the future and society is strengthened by such hope

The life of a parent is the life of a gambler- Sydney Smith

They gave each other a smile with a future in it- Ring Lardner

You can see your unborn children in her eyes -Bryan Adams

Love makes everything lovely. Hate concentrates itself on the one thing hated - George MacDonald

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societal base for honesty and integrity in future generations

The words a father speaks to his children in the privacy of their home are not overheard at the time, but as in whispering galleries, they will be clearly heard at the end and by posterity - Richter

societal base for loyalty

If you want to know a person's faults, go to those who love him. They will not tell you, but they know - Stevenson

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the value of the vested interest

Men love their children, not because they are promising plants but because they are theirs- Halifax

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the strong force of lost love to motivate bad things

We are all in awe of love's power to create and destroy

Oh what a heaven is love! O what a hell! Thomas Dekker

It is difficult to lay aside a confirmed passion - Catullus

Take away love and our earth is a tomb- Robert Browning

The tragedy of love is indifference- Somerset Maugham

Respectfully submitted

Beverley Smith

women's and children's rights activist

Calgary

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