



STUDY GUIDE

WHO'S MORE COMPASSIONATE: THE LEFT OR THE RIGHT?

KEY TERMS:

compassion
kindness

ambit
contradiction

free market
welfare state

NOTE-TAKING COLUMN: Complete this section during the video. Include definitions and key terms.

What does generosity require?

What do liberals promote as the best way to alleviate suffering?

What is the whole point of compassion?

CUE COLUMN: Complete this section after the video.

What are the differences between liberals and conservatives in terms of reasoning and approach to helping those in need?

What are the differences between liberals and conservatives in terms of the outcomes in approach to helping those in need?

DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- At the beginning of the video, Dr. Voegeli asks, “What’s the major difference between liberals and conservatives? For liberals the answer is easy. Liberals are compassionate and conservatives are mean.” Why do you think that liberals tend to come to this characterization so often and so easily? Why is this characterization so inaccurate and ignorant?
- Dr. Voegeli goes on to explain that, “To provide needy people tangible assistance, as opposed to inconsequential gestures, requires wealth. And wealth has to be created before it can be donated... Both economic theory and the historical record of different, competing economic systems, clearly show that the best way to create wealth is to narrow, rather than broaden, ‘the ambit of our concern.’” What do you think Dr. Voegeli means by ‘inconsequential gestures?’ How, specifically, can concerned individuals and groups ‘narrow the ambit of their concern,’ and how can such an action create wealth to help others with?
- Later, Dr. Voegeli points out that, “...liberals frequently criticize the “selfishness” of people preoccupied with building careers, businesses, and investments. On the other [hand], liberals are bursting with ideas for all the humane things government can do by redistributing the wealth created by these so-called selfish people.” What are some fundamental flaws in this liberal mindset? Why do you think that liberals tend to dismiss or ignore the connection between the drive to create wealth and the ability to actually help others, either directly or indirectly?
- Dr. Voegeli shares with us a framework for his main point when stating, “Liberals champion government action as the best vehicle to alleviate suffering. At the same time, they are uninterested in the question of whether these government programs actually do alleviate suffering... The problem is not a deficiency of compassion, but the defective moral logic of compassion itself. The word “compassion” means, literally, “suffering together with another.” And there’s the problem. The whole point of compassion is for empathizers to feel better when the awareness of another’s suffering distresses the observer. But this ultimate purpose does not guarantee that those who are the object of empathy will fare better.” Why do you think that liberals tend to quickly and severely limit their options for helping others to that of legislation and government programs, especially in light of the continued history of such epic failures of most such legislation and programs? Why do you think that liberals tend to think that once a government program is created to help a group or class of people that the problem is then solved... without caring to see if the program actually works or not?
- At the end of the video, Dr. Voegeli concludes that, “The liberal asks, “Does it feel good?” The conservative asks, “Does it do good?” If you really want to help people, it should be pretty obvious which is the more important question.” Why do you think that liberals tend to hyper-focus on the suffering and what they imagine will alleviate it rather than on results-oriented action? Do you think ‘doing good’ is better than ‘feeling good’ in terms of helping people? Why or why not?

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: Food Stamps (SNAP)

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “TOP 10 REASONS FOOD STAMPS NEED TO BE REFORMED,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What did the GAO report conclude regarding SNAP? Why would Walmart oppose attempts to decrease food stamp enrollment? According to the article, what should the goal of any government welfare program be? Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Do you agree with the reasoning in the article? If yes, which parts and why? If no, which parts and why?
- Do you see the SNAP program as an example of ‘feeling good’ rather than ‘doing good?’ Why or why not? What might be some better ways to help poor people eat, without them becoming dependent on the mechanism that helps them at first?



QUIZ

WHO'S MORE COMPASSIONATE: THE LEFT OR THE RIGHT?

1. Conservatives take positive glee in inflicting further suffering on the already miserable.
 - a. True
 - b. False

2. To provide needy people tangible assistance requires _____.
 - a. government intervention
 - b. compassion
 - c. wealth
 - d. politicians

3. The best way to create wealth is to _____ "the ambit of our concern."
 - a. narrow
 - b. broaden
 - c. eliminate
 - d. question

4. Federal, state, and local governments spend more than _____ per American on programs designed to prevent or relieve poverty.
 - a. \$1,000
 - b. \$5,000
 - c. \$10,000
 - d. \$20,000

5. The word "compassion" means, literally, _____?
 - a. lack of interest or concern
 - b. pitying someone else's misfortune
 - c. understand the feelings of another
 - d. suffering together with another



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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TOP 10 REASONS FOOD STAMPS NEED TO BE REFORMED

[By Andrew Montgomery](#)

06/13/2013

Roughly 80 percent of the nearly \$1 trillion dollar Farm Bill currently under debate in Congress deals with food and nutrition assistance programs such as food stamps, the largest of which is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In recent years, food stamps have grown into a major financial obligation. Enrollment in SNAP has increased dramatically, [rising](#) from 26 million in 2007 (one in twelve Americans) to nearly 47 million in 2012 (one in seven Americans). Costs have increased dramatically as well, rising from \$35 billion in 2007 to \$80 billion in 2012, making it the second most expensive means-tested federal welfare program, behind only Medicaid. As such, it is vital to understand the serious flaws in current food stamp programs.

1. They Are Ineffective at Reducing Hunger

A [report](#) compiled by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) noted that while SNAP (the largest food stamp program) has had some positive results, “the literature is inconclusive regarding whether SNAP alleviates hunger and malnutrition in low-income households.” It went on to say that, “those who choose to participate in food assistance programs generally have greater difficulty meeting their food needs and tend to be more food insecure compared to others that are eligible for programs but do not participate.” In other words, these programs, despite costing tens of billions per year, are not making a sizable impact on hunger in America.

2. They are Subject to Large Scale Fraud & Error

The Government Accountability Office [reports](#) that despite great progress, “the amount of SNAP benefits paid in error is substantial, totaling about \$2.2 billion in 2009.” Other food programs are worse. The Daily Caller reports the [story](#) of Adam Sylvain, a student at George Mason University, who recounts, “My roommate told me he applied for food stamps, and they told him he qualified for \$200 a month in benefits... He’s here on scholarship and he saves over \$5,000 each summer in cash. A few of our other friends who were in the room also said if there were able to, they would get food stamps ... They think that if they’re eligible it’s the government’s fault, so they might as well.” Stories like this are not uncommon. Nor is the misuse of food stamp money by retailers or consumers. In fact, [there are only 40 investigators for over 193,000 retailers nationwide](#), making abuse hard to catch.

3. They Lack Transparency

The USDA does not disclose product purchases or how many total SNAP dollars are spent on each product, nor does the USDA disclose how much money retailers make off of SNAP. This makes it hard for investigative journalists and watchdogs to identify fraud in the system. The Association of Health Care Journalists and six other journalist and open-government groups have [requested](#) this information but the USDA refuses to reveal anything. Why is USDA stonewalling journalists? What do they have to hide?

4. They are a Form of Corporate Welfare

[According to](#) public health lawyer Michele Simon of eatdrinkpolitics, “SNAP represents the largest, most overlooked corporate subsidy in the farm bill.” Food stamp programs guarantee large corporations consistent cash flow, creating a powerful corporate lobbying group that seeks to prevent cuts or changes to SNAP. For example, J.P. Morgan has contracts for Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards used for SNAP in half the states and has [spent millions](#) of dollars lobbying Congress. In addition, large food retailers like Kroger and Walmart gain large shares of SNAP purchases. In some states, Walmart captures upwards to 50 percent of all SNAP purchases. These companies now have a vested interest in opposing any attempts to decrease food stamp enrollment.

5. Food Stamp Advertising Emphasizes Enrollment over Need

The USDA has conducted a massive campaign to increase the number of food stamp recipients, even hiring recruiters who must fulfill enrollment quotas. The USDA in its “Community Partner Outreach Toolkit” [webpage](#) gives ideas of how to spread awareness and increase enrollment. [Ideas](#) have been implemented such as SNAP-based bingo games for the elderly, food-stamp parties, and fliers that read, “Be a patriot. Bring your food stamp money home.” But it doesn’t stop here; the U.S. and Mexico began a [partnership](#) in 2004 to “provide information on eligibility criteria for Food and Nutrition Service programs,” and that includes disseminating a Spanish language [flyer](#) that tells undocumented immigrants, “You need not divulge information regarding your immigration status in seeking this benefit [food stamps] for your children.” The U.S. also [supplies](#) 1/3 of the Puerto Rican population with food stamps, costing U.S. taxpayers roughly \$2 billion annually. Clearly, food stamp programs have become more and more about numbers, instead of need.

6. They Overlap and Create Inefficiencies

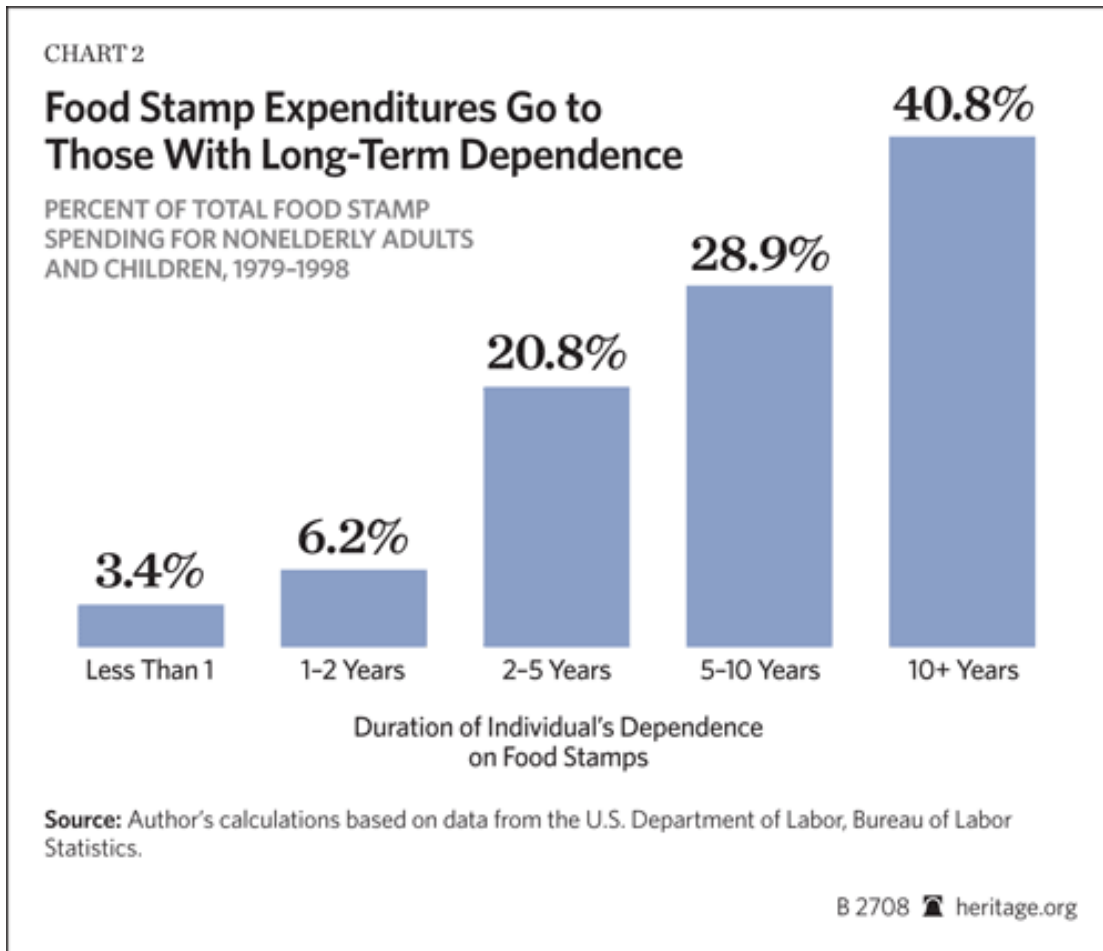
A report compiled by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) [stated](#) that, “the 18 food assistance programs show signs of program overlap, which can create unnecessary work and lead to inefficient use of resources.” Indeed, [administrative costs](#) equal about \$5.5 billion per year, or about 10 percent of the value of food stamps distributed.

7. They Lack Effective Work Requirements

On top of loosening eligibility requirements in both the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills, and easing restrictions on states to qualify participants in the 90s, the 2009 Stimulus plan suspended the SNAP’s work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs), a ‘temporary’ suspension that has continually been renewed. This creates an incentive for individuals to not work, because such action would likely jeopardize their eligibility for food stamps. [According to](#) the Congressional Research Service, participation in SNAP has doubled among these ABAWDs- from 1.9 million to 3.9 million - far outpacing general enrollment increases. This change allows individuals to stay on food stamps with less incentive to improve their economic situation, draining taxpayers and discouraging self-reliance.

8. They Create Dependency

The goal of any government welfare program should be to get people back on their feet, not to keep them in poverty and hunger. Current food stamp programs have little work required as a condition of assistance, encouraging the relatively well off to freeload off the system and those in need to remain in poverty.



9. They Have Become a Burden on Taxpayers

While a large share of the rise in food stamp enrollment is due to our economic downturn, over-active advertising and loosening of eligibility requirements have permanently (unless reformed) enlarged food stamp programs. The CBO [projects](#) that by 2022, 34 million people will be enrolled in SNAP and expenditures will total \$73 billion, much higher than \$19.8 billion spent in 2000.

10. They Should Be Handled by States

Currently, SNAP's funding comes completely from the federal government, encouraging states to enroll as many people as possible. In fact, in the states' view, there is little or no problem if food stamps are being abused; it is not "their" problem. This only leads to increasing costs. States can also use what's called "[categorical eligibility](#)" for SNAP in which they determine eligibility not on the program's income or asset limitations but on individual's participation in other welfare assistance programs. This usually leads to relaxed standards. Sending the money directly to states as block-grants would give states more flexibility and encourage them to minimize cost and maximize effectiveness, as proven by the successful welfare reforms of the 1990s.