

January 24, 2018  
NAE Christian Student Leadership Conference  
Russell Building – SR325  
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Good Morning –

So I too am a longtime student and sometimes a professor as well.

But I love being an activist and advocate most. I've worked in the arena of global health and development since about 2002 – at the interface of faith and policy.

Today we are talking about the importance of climate change. Yet, I want to introduce a separate yet equally complicated issue – a global health and development issue -- which intersects with climate change: healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies.

For the past five years, we've partnered with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to educate and activate faith leaders across the nation on this critical global health issue which is Melinda's priority issue. And in doing so, we've rallied Christian music artists, authors, pastors, nonprofit leaders, university leaders, and other Christian influencers to rethink and reconsider this key issue among the interconnected and systemic issues of global health and extreme poverty.

Healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies, or international family planning, does not include abortion. To be clear, the Helms amendment of 1973, the Kemp-Kasten amendment, and the Mexico City Policy all prohibit any funding to go to or be used for abortion at any time – under any administration. What it does include is access to contraceptives for child brides, for married women – whose average age is 16 in most developing nations, and for couples to make better

decisions to healthily time and space pregnancies as a life-saving mechanism for both the mother and the child.

If girls can debut or “time” that first pregnancy at the age of 20 instead of 16, they are 5 times more likely to survive the complications of pregnancy and childbirth. And if she can “space” her pregnancies three years apart, the child is twice as likely to survive its first year of life. Access to contraceptives is a life and death issue for millions of women and children every year worldwide.

Buts its also an educational issue, a hunger issue, a poverty issue, and a health issue. If a woman can time and space her pregnancies, she can stay in school. Or she can afford to keep all of her children in school. She doesn't have to choose which child doesn't get to eat breakfast that day; she can feed them all. She can go back to work. She can contribute to her family's income. And maternal and child health improves across communities, societies, and nations .

But its also a climate issue. The World Health organization has spotlighted Ethiopia as a poster child for healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies where they have increased access to voluntary family planning or contraceptives to over 30 percent of women of childbearing age. Studies show if they were to double their population in the coming years, there would inevitably be a depletion of resources causing food insecurity, depletion of clean water access and resources, deforestation, increase of greenhouse gases, and increase of vulnerabilities to natural disasters.

When we talk about global health and its systemic issues, we want to get ahead of the issues- prevention is key. And supporting the pennies of funding for prevention saves millions of dollars later.

When we support healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies, we are inadvertently also addressing climate change.

I was with Dr. Paul Osteen of Lakewood Church not too long ago at a luncheon, and he closed with this: “global health is rocket science. It is a very complicated set of issues which requires very complicated solutions.”

And I would add that it also requires the political will of the American people to keep up the momentum of the good work that has already been done over the last 25 years. During this time we have halved extreme poverty, halved malarial deaths, halved tuberculosis deaths, halved maternal mortality and early child deaths. We are halfway there.

But most Americans don't even know this. Moreover, they also don't know how much we spend in governmental funding on foreign assistance which has been a huge contributor to this success.

Does anyone here know? How much of the U.S. budget goes to international affairs or global health and development – take a guess... 30%? 25% 10%? Less?

When asked, more than 50 percent of Americans say about 28% of the U.S. budget goes to foreign aid.

The reality? Less than 1%.

This isn't tithing. This is a 10% of 10%. This is a penny to the dollar. Yet this funding may go farther than any other of sector of funding in providing life-saving drugs, food, clean water, education, and health care for millions worldwide.

These issues of climate change and international family planning correlate, as do many other issues – yet we must sit with the complexities, requiring both education and debate, if we are called to be stewards of the earth and good samaritans.

What can you do?

First, learn about the issues.

Take the time to learn about global health and development. Even a cursory understanding will show you that these are deeply moral and ethical issues which require us, as Christians, to engage.

Secondly, consider advocacy.

It doesn't matter the person or the party in office – advocacy is needed as a Christian practice in discipleship, particularly to love our neighbors who may live on less than a dollar a day, extreme poverty.

This means simply lending your voice on behalf of the world's poorest. Speaking up. Saving lives. Defending the minute funding we have in foreign assistance.

And thirdly – let your Congressional Representative or Senator or President know that you care about global health and development. That you want to see them support the 1% of the U.S. budget for the International Affairs Account. Let them know that this is a moral issue. Give them permission to do the right thing.

Thank you.

And have a wonderful conference!!

And I'm happy to answer any questions.