

# NEW YORK POST

## FATHERLESS SON CHAMPIONS MARRIAGE

*New York Post*

By Maggie Gallagher

Matt Daniels knows a thing or two about fatherless families. He was just the sort of kid certain sorts of liberals think they are defending when they instruct us to rename family breakdown "family diversity," as if a fancy new name could fill the void left in a boy's heart when Dad disappears. A white kid who grew up in Spanish Harlem, Matt was the only son of a chronically ill, welfare-dependent divorced mom.

Now Matt Daniels runs the new nonprofit, nonpartisan Alliance for Marriage ([www.allianceformarriage.org](http://www.allianceformarriage.org)) with a distinguished and decidedly diverse board of advisers, including Dr. Walter Fauntroy of the National Black Leadership Round Table, Dr. Sayyid Sayeed of the Islamic Society of North America, Rabbi Nathan Diament of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations and Rev. Won Sang Lee of the Korean Central Presbyterian Church. Racially and religiously diverse, they are firmly united on one thing: the importance of rebuilding America's marriage culture.

And in this they are not alone. The Alliance for Marriage just released the results of a Wirthlin poll that shows Americans of all political ideologies share their commitment. "Concern for stronger families cuts across political and ideological lines; it trumps jobs, it trumps the environment, among all groups of voter," Matt told me.

Majorities of Democrats, independents and Republicans reject the "family change, not decline" hypothesis, with 55 percent of Dems, 65 percent of independents and 62 percent of GOP voters calling the family either "not very strong" or "weak and losing ground."

Independents - not Republicans - expressed the deepest concern about the state of the family, which explains a lot about the way Gore and Bush are pitching their campaign messages.

By about 2-to-1, voters in both parties find strengthening families more important than job opportunities or a cleaner environment. More than three-quarters of Americans say they support requiring counseling before granting married families a divorce, as well as decreasing taxes for married couples with children. Once again, Democrats are as likely as Republicans to support such measures.

How did Matt go from child of welfare to creator of a national marriage alliance? "For many years," he tells me, "I was just trying to survive." To make it, to get out of the inner city, through college. But one day he entered Martha Fineman's law school class. Martha Fineman is a renowned feminist legal theorist, one of the driving forces shaping family law today.

On the first day of class, according to Matt, Professor Fineman stood up and said, "I defy anyone in this room to assert the absence of men from the lives of children and families is a bad thing."

What did you do? I wondered. "Kept my head down, parroted back her ideology on her exams and got an 'A,'" he tells me. But a few years later, here he is spearheading a new effort to find ways that civil society and public policy can work together to promote and strengthen marriage as an institution.

"Our benchmark is [Sen. Daniel Patrick] Moynihan's famous comment: 'The main objective of American government at every level should be to see to it that every child is born into intact families and remains so.' This is priority one for us," says Matt.

Among the proposals championed by the Alliance? Tax relief for married families, increased tax incentives for adoption, pre-divorce counseling requirements, improving federal research on marriage and divorce, eliminating welfare policies that punish marriage, funding public information campaigns to highlight the importance of marriage and family, working with fathers to commit to children and wives.

My husband is a teacher, and I always tell him: You do more good than you know.

Thank you, Martha Fineman.