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THE ANTI-RELIGIOUS PROVISIONS OF THE CHILD CARE BILL

The Chris Dodd Federal Child Care Bill, S.1885, introduced a few weeks ago with much fanfare, contains the most outrageously anti-religious provisions ever to appear in any Congressional legislation. The clear intent of the bill seems to be to impose rigorously secular child care on all American children.

Section 19(a)(1) states that no funds shall be expended for "sectarian purposes or activities." This is followed by (a)(2)(A) which defines "sectarian" in a most peculiar way: "advancing or promoting a particular religion or religion generally." According to dictionary definitions, "sectarian" refers to a particular sect or religion, whereas "religion generally" is just the opposite.

Thus, if a low-income mother places her child in a day-care center where the children say, "Thank you, God, for this food" over their cookies and milk, the mother and her child are disqualified from Dodd bill benefits.

Section 19(a)(2)(B) expands the definition of "sectarian" so as to disqualify, or dictate to, every child care center that has any connection at all with a religious institution. If space is provided for child care "on the premises" of a sectarian institution, "all religious symbols and artifacts" must be covered or removed.

Further, if any teacher or teacher's aide in a sectarian school provides any services (paid or volunteer) to a child care center located on the premises of that school, all the children who use the child care center are disqualified from Dodd bill benefits.

The alleged beneficiaries of this bill are low-income mothers who are most likely to find safe, affordable, convenient day care in connection with churches. But using these facilities would prohibit them from receiving any Dodd bill benefits.

Section 19(b) prohibits any funds to be spent for "the construction, repair, or renovation of any facility located on the premises of a religious institution." Even though the child care facility is not sectarian, if it is on the "premises," no funds could be expended to remove some lead-based paint, to install a ramp for handicapped kids,

or to help meet safety standards for children.

Section 20(a) states that "any financial assistance provided to a child care provider under this Act including a loan, grant, or child care certificate, shall constitute Federal financial assistance within the meaning of title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d), title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. 1681), et seq.), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794), and the regulations promulgated under such."

This would set the precedent that child care subsidies -- Dodd calls them "certificates" -- constitute federal "assistance" to the entire institution, not just to the child care facility. This is a back-door leap into the massive regulations which are so offensive in the Grove City bill that it has been held up in Congress for two years. Its tremendous assault on the rights of religious institutions is admitted by all.

Here is how Section 20(a) of Dodd's federal child care bill would impact. A religious university sets up a child care center for its employees and students. To conform to the Dodd bill, the university makes its child care scrupulously secular, it even prohibits grace before meals, it removes all religious symbols and art, and it prohibits any of its teaching personnel from performing even volunteer child care work.

Despite all this, the first day that the child care center accepts one "certificate" from a low-income mother, that automatically puts the entire university into the full regulatory harness of all the above listed laws. This includes the regulations implementing Title IX that mandate not only that abortions be paid for as part of any medical plan, but even that all hospitals with any teaching affiliation or component be required to perform abortions despite religious objections.

Section 20(b) would prohibit any separation of boys and girls for "any child care services." This is a federal mandate for unisex child rearing.

Section 20(c) applies the prohibitions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to all child care centers (even though they do not have 15 employees -- the threshold limit in that law). More ominously, it eliminates the exemption in the Civil Rights Law that allows religious institutions to favor members of their own faith in hiring.

The Dodd federal child-care bill is so anti-religious that, if any religious organizations are listed as sponsors, we can only assume that its leaders are among the 23 million Americans who are illiterate.