PS1 for 3/16/89 # The Politics of Daycare

When President George Bush delivered his Budget Message to Congress on February 9, the conservative, pro-family approach to child care came of age. With striking clarity, he said: “I support a new child care tax credit… without discriminating against mothers who stay at home.”

The child care tax credit is the plan that is fair to both employed mothers and homemaker mothers. As President Bush pointed out, the overwhelming majority of employed mothers use daycare by relatives and neighbors, churches and community groups, and families who choose these options should be just as eligible for tax-credit help as those who choose institutional care.

With his proposal, President Bush seized the initiatives on the child care issue and shot an arrow into the Achilles’ heel of the coalition of interest groups which has promoted federally financed and federally regulated daycare for the past year. There are four separate segments to this coalition, and each supports daycare for its own purposes.

The first leg in this four-legged coalition is the feminists. Their ideology has taught them for years that society’s expectation that mothers take care of their own children is unfair, degrading, and oppressive to women. They think this is what makes women second-class citizens, makes wives a servant class, and impedes women’s opportunity to participate full-time in the paid labor force and thereby achieve economic equality with men.

Feminist spokesmen and activists have taught young women to expect men to share equally in changing diapers and other child-tending duties. Since their rising expectations of changing human nature remain unfulfilled, the feminists argue that government must provide daycare for all children outside the home in order for women to have full equality with men in the workplace.

The notion of universal federal daycare did not originate with the feminists but with the so-called social engineers who use the 1970 White House Conference on Children to recommend that “federally-supported public education be made available for children at age three.”

That conference explained in its final report: “Daycare is a powerful institution. A daycare program that ministers to a child from six months to six years of age has over 8,000 hours to teach him values, fears, beliefs and behaviors.” The federal legislative proposal designed to implement that report was the 1971 Comprehensive Child Development bill sponsored by Senator Walter Mondale and Rep. John Brademas, which called for a $2 billion network of federal daycare institutions.

That bill passed Congress but was vetoed by President Richard Nixon, who called it a “radical piece of legislation” and “a long leap into the dark.” He said it would “lead toward altering the family relationship.”

The chief ideologue of these child developmentalists is Edward F. Zigler of Yale University who (coincidentally on the same day that George Bush gave him message to Congress) testified in behalf of a new bill sponsored by Rep. Augustus Hawkins (D-CA), which is really a

reincarnation of the old discredited Mondale Brademas bill. Zigler urged spending tens of billions of dollars a year to establish a federal network of daycare for all children headquartered in the public schools.

Zigler called for a “comprehensive school-based child care” network as an integrated system that would be “part of the very structure of society.” He eagerly looks forward to the day when America will have 26 million children in some type of paid daycare.

The third component of the new daycare coalition is the liberal Democrats, who have been following a campaign strategy laid out during their retreat at the Greenbrier resort in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, in January 1988. Their game plan is to use “kids as politicas” to try to reclaim the family issues that the liberals lost to the Republicans during the Reagan years. They think they can do that by taking over the baby-sitting of preschool children.

The fourth factor in the new daycare coalition is the social service professionals. This is the vast army of tax-salaried people who would like to expand their ranks, their pay, and their turf by taking over more social problems that require more care and more counseling, more staff and more funds.

It is, indeed, a formidable liberal coalition that is so loudly demanding a gigantic federal baby-sitting bureaucracy and apparatus. But the liberals will not be able to sell their risky and high-priced product because the American people don’t want the feds to take over the raising of our children.