PS for 4/19/90

The Total Difference in the Child Care Bills

When the liberal Democratic leadership plowed ahead with its determination to set up a federal baby-sitting bureaucracy, House conservatives countered with their substitute, called Stenholm-Shaw. The difference between Hawkins-Downey and Stenholm-Shaw is so awesome that it simply cannot be compromised, and that is why President Bush has promised to veto the Democrats' bill.

The choice is between going forward into the '90s as a free people with stronger families, or regressing into Swedish-style socialism, starting with babes in the cradle.

Hawkins-Downey would turn the public schools into baby-sitters. The bill would set up government daycare in public schools available to all three- and four-year-old children. This proposal is the crux of the discredited ABC daycare bill and is what the overreaching bureaucrats seek most of all, but it was not mentioned in the House debate because it is too radical to be broadcast live over C-Span into the home of grassroots America.

Hawkins-Downey would mandate before-and-after school daycare for school-aged children, and it would be all-year-long, including summer vacations and holidays. Stenholm-Shaw had no such mandate, but made funds available for latchkey children if states choose to spend it that way.

Hawkins-Downey discriminates against religious providers by prohibiting the use of certificates in religious daycare in two out of the three programs funded by the bill, and would permit the states to prohibit such use in the third program funded by the bill. Stenholm-Shaw allows certificates to be spent with full parental freedom of choice, in secular or religious daycare.

Both bills allow "certificates" to be given to parents as an alternative to government-regulated, secular daycare. But Hawkins-Downey certificates would have to be spent for daycare prescribed and regulated by the bureaucrats, while Stenholm-Shaw certificates could be spent with any provider chosen by the parent, including grandparents, neighbors, churches, or private-sector daycare.

Put another way, Hawkins-Downey puts child-care decision-making in the hands of a giant new daycare bureaucracy, while Stenholm-Shaw puts it in the hands of the parents.

Under Hawkins-Downey, if the state allows certificates to be used in religious daycare, it must impose so many regulations that few if any churches would be willing to accept them. In the 13 states which now exempt religious daycare from state licensing and regulation, religious providers that receive certificates would be forced to comply with federally-approved state standards, or else the state would become ineligible for further federal funding.

The results would be just as harmful in states that now regulate religious daycare. Hawkins-Downey forbids states ever to reduce their regulations without federal approval, and this would wipe out any hope of religious daycare providers to repeal or mitigate current oppressive, unnecessary, unworkable or expensive state regulations.

Hawkins-Downey would impose 160 new federal standards and mandates, covering child-staff ratios, staff qualifications and training, and enforcement. States would be prohibited from changing their regulations without federal approval, which would effectively transfer daycare regulation from state to federal control.

Stenholm-Shaw has no federal standards or regulations. It recognizes the fact that all 50 states have set their own regulations, and that those differences should be respected.

Hawkins-Downey would transform Head Start into a full-day federal daycare program for non-poor children, in other words, into a baby-sitting program for all eligible three- and four-year-olds. Stenholm-Shaw would extend Head Start to more poor children, adhering to its true purpose of preparing disadvantaged children to enter school.

Stenholm-Shaw has a special provision to give an extra few hundred dollars of tax credit to all “wee tots,” children under one year of age. Hawkins-Downey has no such provision.

Congress had a full two weeks to study the text of the $20.5 billion Stenholm-Shaw bill, and it stood up well under inspection. It’s no wonder that the sponsors

of the $28.9 billion Hawkins-Downey bill kept its text secret until 30 hours before the vote, and then had to crack the party whip to force its passage.

When George Bush campaigned for President, he promised a no-strings-attached non-discriminatory $1,000 tax credit for each preschool child. Like the famous line of the TV ad “where’s the beef?” the question parents are asking is “where’s our $1,000?” Parents want tax reduction, NOT a federal baby-sitting bureaucracy.