PS1 for 8/11/88#GEORGE BUSH KISSES BABIES, TOO

Kissing babies has been part of presidential campaigning in America for more than a century. Instead of waiting for babes in arms to show up at political rallies, the modern method of kissing more babies more efficiently is for campaign staffs to arrange for their candidates to visit a day care center and bring the television cameras along.

Accordingly, viewers of the TV nightly newscasts are treated to pictures of Michael Dukakis and George Bush affectionately interacting with infants in an institutional setting. The children who were crying, bored, mischievous, or being diapered are kept out of the camera's eye.

The sound tracks of these media events don't give us the conversation between the candidates and the preschoolers, since it is probably on an intellectual level even lower than ordinary television. This gives the network commentators the opportunity to dub in their own reporting of what is taking place.

When George Bush unveiled his child care proposal in Albuquerque, this was reported as political news. Michael Dukakis had already been given national media exposure, in a friendly, nonpolitical, ""compassionate'' setting, when PBS featured him on Public Broadcasting's ""documentary'' on day care aired in April.

Bush's proposal was generally reported by the media as though it were an exercise in typical liberal Republican ""me-tooism.'' Liberal newspapers presented it with the underlying message that ""federal day care is now so obviously necessary that George Bush has accepted the inevitable and come out with his own day care proposal.''

The (BF)Wall Street Journal(end BF), coming from the opposite direction, joined in the attack. In a news article (not an editorial), the (BF)Journal(end BF) made it look like Bush's proposal

is (a) an attack on the Reagan's tax reduction policies and (b) a sneaky way to raise taxes.

Worse still, the (BF)Journal(end BF) (still in a news article, not an editorial) accused Bush of trying ""to use the tax code, rather than spending programs, to promote social and economic engineering.'' That is a code expression guaranteed to offend authentic Reaganauts because it means federal busybodies using the carrot and the stick to force us to behave as the federal engineers want us to behave.

At the very least, these reporters, commentators and analysts are seeing the Bush proposal through their own biases and preconceptions. The Bush child care proposal isn't any of those things. Let's set the record straight.

The Bush child care proposal is a very simple plan to reduce taxes on families with children so their parents can spend more of their own hard-earned money for the child care of their choice, without bureaucrats telling them how to spend it. That such a proposal is even controversial shows how far we've gone down the road of Big Brotherism.

Of course, it costs money to raise children! The principal reason why parents are having such a hard time making ends meet is high taxes and the continuing consequences of the double-digit Carter-era inflation.

The liberals used the tax code for years to skew the tax burden against families with children. When I had my first child in 1950, Johnny's tax exemption amounted to 18 percent of the median American family income. By the time I had my first grandchild in 1982 (after 32 years of tax increases and inflation), Tommy's tax exemption amounted to only 4 percent of the median family income.

The liberals didn't just raise taxes across the board. The record is clear that they engaged in tax-code social engineering to punish

families with children and to make a growing segment of the population dependent on federal handouts.

Dukakis' day care position, which is to support the Dodd-Kildee ABC bill, would create a federal baby-sitting bureaucracy and hand out large amounts of money to day care centers, social service employees, government bureaucrats, and regulation writers and enforcers. It's just another expensive liberal spending program gussied up with cute babies in an effort to soften up Dukakis' brittle image.

George Bush is coming from an entirely different direction. He's not trying to establish a government-preferred type of child care. He just wants to reduce the tax burden and let families make their own decisions.

George Bush has also called the bluff of the liberals who sanctimoniously claim to be so concerned about the poor. Whereas the Dukakis-Dodd ABC bill would benefit primarily middle-income, two-earner families (because the mother must be employed to be eligible), the Bush proposal would exclusively benefit low-income families, those who need it most.