from Phyllis Schlafly December 16, 1993

SHOULD SCHOOLS BECOME PARENTS OF PRESCHOOLERS?

A battle in the Illinois General Assembly this year exposed the far-reaching goal of the public school system to bring under its jurisdiction all children beginning at birth, and to do this without any procedure that can reasonably be described as giving parents the right of informed consent. If implemented, this would be a radical departure from past and current expectations that the purpose of our tax-financed school system is to educate children starting about age six or seven.

Whoever rocks the cradle rules the world, according to the old adage. It is clear from this Illinois controversy that powerful groups are lined up to empower the government, rather than parents, to rock the cradle.

But they didn't get by with their plan in Illinois this year. Pro-family groups won a big victory over the public school lobby when they defeated the "Parenting Program," SB159.

The key portion of the 47-page SB159 was the section which authorized and funded a Parenting Grant program to send state employees into the homes of "parents of children in the period of life from birth to kindergarten." Pro-family groups opposed this because sending government employees to supervise what goes on inside the home is the mark of a totalitarian, not a free, nation.

When the public school lobby was showing its muscle and SB159 was racing through the legislature, pro-family groups offered some amendments to make the bad bill tolerable. The essence of the amendments was that government employees would have to get the informed consent of the parents before entering private homes, and that the parenting program should have a "sunset" provision so that it could be

properly evaluated after a couple of years. Here are the amendments.

"No home visits or in-home parenting training shall be allowed under this Section unless the written, informed consent of the participating parents authorizing home visits or in-home parenting training is first obtained by the educational institution, district, private school, not-for-profit corporation, governmental agency, or other entity that is conducting the parenting program.

"The consent form shall contain a clear description of the program including the activities and information to be provided by the program during the home visits, the number of expected home visits, any responsibilities of the parents, the fact that a record will be made and maintained on the home visits and may be available in future court proceedings, and such other information as may be necessary to convey to the parents a clear understanding of the program.

"If any home visits are to be made by program personnel who are required to report suspected abused or neglected children under the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act, the consent form shall also contain a clear and conspicuous statement informing parents that the home visits will be made by a person who is required to report any instances of suspected abuse or neglect of children to the Department of Children and Family Services.

"Consent for the home visits or in-home parenting training may be revoked at any time for any reason by the participating parents. Consent for home visits or in-home parenting training shall be invalid if obtained within **4 weeks** before or after the birth of a child.

"Parents shall have access to the records on their own family at all times and shall have the right to correct any inaccurate information included within the records. Parents shall have a right of action against any program personnel for the knowing or reckless

inclusion of defamatory or derogatory information within the records.

"No parenting program shall be allowed to include home visits or in-home training after July 1, 1995.

"The State Board of Education shall report to the General Assembly by July 1, 1995 on the results of the birth to kindergarten and K-12 parenting programs, the effectiveness of home visits as a component of parenting programs, and whether such home visits are necessary for the continuation of the programs."

Despite the reasonableness of these amendments, which were overwhelmingly approved by both houses of the legislature, the tax salaried child advocacy bureaucrats had a tantrum, crying all around the state that the amendments would "set an ominous precedent." Indeed, they would set the precedent that government agents must give you full information before they enter your home to evaluate your parenting and tell you how to raise your children.

When the compromise bill went to Governor Jim Edgar, he struck out every one of the above amendments with an amendatory veto. Pro-family groups called this a betrayal of the agreement, and they went all-out to defeat the bill in toto. They were successful; the bill died at the adjournment of the legislature.

If you think your home is your own private space which government agents may not enter without a warrant, think again. All over the country, the public school unions and social service bureaucrats are demanding entry to private homes without a warrant in order to evaluate parents and tell them how to raise their preschool children.