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Release: December 17, 2013

Pre-K Is for Bureaucrats, Not Kids

In an attempt to shift public discussion from the Obamacare train wreck, as well as toady to the feminists, Barack Obama is again promoting universal tax-paid daycare for preschoolers. But spending $75 billion on free preschool for all won't work any better than the numerous times it's been tried before.

Progressives don't call it spending but instead use the code word "investments" to disguise tax increases. Obama wants to line up big-business support with a fairy tale that daycare "investments" will pay off by turning out kids who will be better trained for school-to-work.

Lobbyists for early childhood education (pre-K) always cite the Perry Preschool Project conducted years ago in Ypsilanti, Michigan, as their model. But it was based on separate classes of six preschool-age children, each class taught by a well-trained teacher with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education plus extra training in a special curriculum.

Each teacher conducted a two-and-a-half-hour-daily class with the children, and then had a 90-minute visit at each child's home in the afternoon. The mothers in the Perry Project were required to be stay-at-home moms, married, and supported by the husband's income.

Obama's top economist, Austan Goolsbee, bases the argument that expenditures for universal pre-K education will produce social goodies by citing the Perry Preschool Project. But the Perry results have never been replicated despite many subsequent attempts, so that study is not scientifically credible.

Two embarrassing facts shoot more holes in any pretense of using the Perry Project as a model for pre-K spending. The Perry Project was 50 years ago (1962-67) when there were dozens of differences in our family and child-care culture, and all the 123 kids chosen for the project had stay-at-home moms.

That lifestyle for children was very different from today; we had the nuclear family as the norm, and a very different culture of child care. The Perry Project did not involve a takeover of little kids by government nanny care, but a mere 2.5 hours a day of

training with a well-educated teacher plus home visits to give specialized, personal counseling to the stay-at-home mothers.

Economist Goolsbee cited the work of another economist, James J. Heckman, who asserted that "each dollar invested [in government daycare] returns in present value terms 7 to 10 dollars back to society." Heckman's rash conclusion was endlessly echoed by so-called daycare experts, who claim that the Perry Project gave society a return of six to seven times its cost. Goolsbee then solemnly pontificated that this exceeded "the historical returns of the stock market."

With its virtually one-on-one, hands-on care of children, the Perry Project was prohibitively costly -- about $19,000 a year per student in today's dollars. The other project touted by the advocates of Big Government raising our children from an early age, the famous Head Start program that began in Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, has been running for nearly 50 years and still does not provide evidence that government would ever do a better job than mothers.

Our generous U.S. taxpayers have poured billions of dollars into Head Start, which claims to apply the logic of the Perry Preschool Project. The government's own evaluation of Head Start by the Department of Health and Human Services showed that, while there were some initial positive impacts from Head Start, "by the end of third grade there were very few impacts found in any of the four domains of cognitive, social-emotional, health and parenting practices."

Of course, we want to raise the low rankings of U.S. kids on international tests. The trouble is we've spent large chunks of money with minimal results. Well-established pre-K programs in Georgia and Oklahoma also show that a majority of 4-year-olds failed to justify the money spent.

Just last month, the liberal Brookings Institution admitted that the supposed benefits of pre-K programs often "don't last even until the end of kindergarten." Brookings' lead research analyst commented, "I see these findings as devastating for advocates of the expansion of state pre-K programs."

We should get the facts, learn from past failures, and abandon pie-in-the-sky projects before we "invest" any more taxpayers' money. How about a study to find out if

kids do better in school if they have the good fortune to live with their own mother and father like the kids in the famous Perry Project?

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