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WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN

In line with its policies of returning as much federal money and power as possible to the states, the Reagan Administration cancelled the national conference scheduled by the Carter Administration for 1981 under the name "White House Conference on Children," and then distributed the funds appropriated for that purpose to the states to run their own separate "White House Conferences." Eight states returned the federal grant and held no conference at all.

The experience of the state conferences proves the wisdom of cancelling the national conference. Such conferences are simply vehicles used by government employees and social service professionals (who call themselves "providers" and depend on government grants) to think up new ways of expanding their tax funds, control and influence.

National White House Conferences can have a significant impact when they have several million dollars to bring in name speakers and delegates, orchestrate the publicity, and stage-manage the production. Separate state conferences, with only $50,000 more or less to spend, no big names and little publicity, have less impact and do less damage.

But since their goals and tactics are the same, they provide instructive local lessons in why the Reagan Administration was wise to cancel the national event.

The Missouri Conference on Children and Youth, funded by $45,625 in federal monies, met in Jefferson City on December 7-8, 1981. The stated goal of the conference was to develop "networking partnerships," to create interdependence among all governmental health agencies, and to implement these plans in the public schools.

The conference was devoted to governmental supervision and management of child care during the first five years of a child's life. The oft-used phrase "networking partnerships" was carefully chosen to clothe the radical concept that government, public school, and social service professionals should take over the care of infants, with the public schools as middlemen-brokers.

The theme of the conference, set by Governor Kit Bond in his opening speech, was:

"Only ten percent of the children are adequately educated between the eight month to two year period." It is not clear what conclusion he drew from that statement, but it is clear that the social service professionals draw a radical and anti-family conclusion.

For example, the first speaker Dr. Burton White argued that, to be effective, educators must reach the child at birth, with the parents acting as caretakers under the direction of the professionals from age zero to two and a half. After that, both the management and the service of the child should be in the hands of the professionals.

We are indebted to Mrs. Laura Rogers, who attended the Missouri conference, for her eye-witness report. She concluded that the "networking partnership" envisioned by the speakers would build a management net for infants and preschool children by "parenting" courses, developmental testing, a complete data system, mandatory "health" (sex) courses, and the use of the public schools as change agents.

The Illinois Conference on Children, held in Chicago on December 8-9, 1981, was funded by $74,000 of federal monies. We are indebted for an eye-witness report to Mrs. Carol Trumpe and the others who signed the official minority report.

The pro-family minority in the Illinois conference pointed out in its report that, although the subject was supposed to be "children," there was a lack of focus on the need for a solid family structure in which to rear children. There was no recognition of marriage as the legal foundation of a stable family. Instead, there was open endorsement of a broad defintion of the family "because of the existence of various forms of relationships (i.e., communal, gay, live-ins, etc.) which include children in the household."

Some of the speakers propounded concepts offensive to pro-family delegates. One speaker, when pressed for a defintion of a family, replied, "a caretaker system in which the child happens to live." Another speaker ridiculed the concept of privacy of the family and the traditional family concept. Some speakers were openly hostile to the Judeo-Christian ethic.

Of course, many good and sincere people attended these conferences, and some were even able to speak. But the various White House Conferences on Education, Families, Women, the Aging, and now Children and Youth, have resulted principally in alienation and polarization. Let people with similar values go to their own conferences, but, please, no more White House Conferences at the taxpayers' expense.