P.S. to the NEWS
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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT

The Domestic Violence and Prevention Services Act (H.R. 2977) passed the House with very little opposition in December, but is producing accelerating controversy in the Senate where the Child and Human Development Subcommittee has scheduled hearings in March. A coalition of church groups charge that the bill will enable the federal HEW Department eventually to intervene directly in family disputes.

One would think that the federal bureaucrats would be involved in enough disputes, both foreign and domestic, that they would be loath to get in the middle of fights between husbands and wives. But the natural growth impetus of the federal bureaucracy is always to look for more problems to solve, so that more tax funds can be appropriated, more federal employees hired, and more control exerted over our lives.

The bill would authorize $65 million for shelters for abused spouses and set up a national clearinghouse on domestic violence to make recommendations to Congress on matters which may affect victims of domestic violence. It can be reliably predicted that the first batch of recommendations will be to appropriate more tax funds for the newly-hired bureaucrats trying to cope with the problems.

The bill would authorize the HEW Secretary to appoint a Coordinator of the program who would operate the national clearinghouse on domestic violence, develop a national media campaign to advertise federal services, and make more recommendations to Congress. The HEW Secretary will award state grants of up to $150,000 each to support, establish and expand state programs under federal guidelines.

The definition of "domestic violence" in the bill is "any act or threatened act of violence, including any forceful detention of an individual which results or threatens to result in physical injury; and is committed by a person 18 years or older against another such person to whom such person is or was related, or by a person of any age against another person with whom such person is residing in a relationship of husband and wife."

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Assault and battery are crimes in every state. More than half the states have civil and criminal laws addressing the particular issue of domestic violence, and about half the states already have in operation some sort of shelters or services for domestic violence victims.

There is no evidence for the proposition that the federal bureaucracy is better able to cope with the problem of husbands beating wives than local law enforcement and local public and private charitable institutions. There is nothing in the bill to support the hope that it can shield even one wife from a violent husband.

Under questioning, many of the experts in domestic violence concede that the principal problem in domestic violence is alcohol, with other drugs close behind. They also concede that most wives who are beaten by their husbands return to them after R&R at a shelter, and that a large percentage of wives return repeatedly.

A consultation sponsored by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, called "Battered Women: Issues of Public Policy," however, came up with a "cause" which sounds more like a product of ideology than of investigation: "the institution of marriage itself and the way in which women and men are socialized to act out dominant-submissive roles that in and of themselves invite abuse."

The Commission's solutions were ingenious: "revolutionary changes in attitudes towards the roles of women and men in our society," the enactment of stringent gun control legislation, the gradual elimination of physical punishment as a mode of childrearing, and the elimination of the husband as "head of the family" from its "continuing presence in the law, in religion, in administrative procedure, and as a taken-for-granted aspect of family life."

The Domestic Violence bill is more than just another request to spend more of our tax dollars which should be defeated because it is unnecessary, untimely, impractical, inflationary, and beyond the competence of the federal government. It is yet another bill which sharpens the focus between those believe in the continued vitality of the traditional family and those who believe its stereotypes are obsolete and should be restructured by an all-wise and all-powerful federal government.

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