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WAREHOUSING CHILDREN

Congress and the State Capitols are now experiencing a tremendous push to legislate facilities and funding for the warehousing of children. It's called child care, but whatever it's called, it is institutional care rather than home care; it is care provided by wages rather than love.

The problem is that employed mothers find their children inconvenient to their job schedule. Large numbers of women have changed their lifestyle and moved into the paid labor force, but babies have stubbornly refused to change their lifestyle and adapt to an empty home. They are just as demanding as babies ever were.

When mothers look about for someone else to fulfill those demands, they find that child-care services which are bought for money (instead of given freely by mothers) are very expensive. The chief reason for the enormous expense is that, whereas a teacher of grade-schoolers can handle a class of 25 children, a care-provider for pre-schoolers can effectively handle only 3 children on the average, and only two if they are infants.

But employed mothers don't want to pay the high cost of employing other persons to provide the care which the children are not getting at home. The mothers want it free or at least heavily subsidized. They want the real cost of child care to be borne by the taxpayers or their fellow employees.

Nothing could be more unjust. Children are the moral and financial responsibility of their parents. It is grievously unfair to impose a tax burden on those who fulfill this responsibility in order to subsidize those who have chosen a lifestyle which shifts this responsibility to someone else.

Those who want taxpayer-financed child care are demanding that the iron hand of the federal tax collectors take funds from one group and transfer them to another. This is not taking from the rich and giving to the poor and needy; it is taking from lower-income traditional families who care for their own children and giving to higher-income two-earner couples who don't care for their own children.

Families who provide in-home mother-care to their children have an average annual

income at least $5,000 less than the two-earner couples who are demanding taxpayer-subsidized child care in order that both parents can remain employed.

Suppose you saved and budgeted your income in order to buy a car. Do you think it would be fair to tax you extra to buy a second car for someone else who has an income of $5,000 more than you do? Would you like it any better if you were told, "But the other family <u>needs</u> a second car so that both spouses can get to work?"

The injustice of transferring the cost burden of child care is only one depressing factor involved in forcing taxpayers to subsidize child-care institutions. An even bigger problem is the unhappy effect on children who are warehoused with hired care-providers (who may change almost as often as the diapers) instead of being reared in a home with a 24-hour-a-day mother.

Women who have visited hundreds of child-care institutions report a dreary situation. They say a handful of children adjust well, a handful cry all the time, and most just wander around a crowded room with no lap to sit on, no one to hug, no individual attention, and no "bonding" to a caring adult who is always there. Incidents of real child abuse are, fortunately, only an occasional occurrence.

The Centers for Disease Control call child-care institutions "a major hotbed" for the spread of infection. Diseases that plague child-care institutions include hepatitis, H-flu meningitis (a brain inflammation that can cause retardation or death), ear infections that cause deafness, measles outbreaks, diarrheal diseases (because at least a million infants in day-care institutions are still in diapers), and colds all the time.

Society simply has not invented a better way of raising children than the traditional family with a father-breadwinner and a mother-homemaker. The division of labor is cost-efficient, the environment is healthy, and the children thrive on the "object constancy" of the mother.

If parents choose to place their children in private child-care institutions, it's not the government's place to stop them. But they have no right to demand a subsidy from the taxpayers or their employers.

The taxpayers have a responsibility to provide for the desperately needy who have no other financial support or resources, but it is unjust for taxpayers or fellow employees to be forced to provide institutional care for children of two-earner families.