PS for 2/22/90

People Just Don't Want Government Child Care

There's a nasty little secret circulating in the cloakrooms of Congress. While liberal Democrats publicly proclaim that a bill will soon pass to plunge the Federal Government headlong into the business of babysitting preschool children, these same Congressmen whisper that there is NO public demand for such legislation.

Congressional Quarterly quoted Congressman Timothy Penny (D-Minn) as saying "Outside of Washington, not too many people care about this bill." Congressman Sam Gibbons' (D-FL) survey of his own constituents provides another case in point. The survey included 17 questions, and most of the answers indicated that he has a generally liberal constituency.

But Question No. 5 asked "Do you think the government should create a program to fund child care services for working families and ensure high standards of quality for the care that is available?" Even though the question was posed in language most advantageous to the establishment of a federal daycare regulatory bureaucracy, a whopping 61 percent of Congressman Gibbons' own constituents voted No.

So, even the liberal Democrats know that their constituents are NOT demanding federal daycare.

Now comes a study from liberal Stanford University which confirms this. Just released this month, the study was based largely on an exit poll of an election held last June in Fremont, California.

Fremont was the first (and so far the only) city in the nation to give the voters a chance to vote to establish daycare for employed parents. The ballot proposition was predicted to pass easily but, to the acute embarrassment of the city fathers who had so enthusiastically endorsed it, it was crushed at the polls with 77.6 percent of voters rejecting government involvement in child care.

In the post-election recriminations, it was assumed that the proposition was defeated because voters were too cheap to pay a small extra tax for daycare. The measure had called for an extra $12-a-year property tax.

The Stanford University study, however, turned up a stunning result. The voters rejected the proposals because they viewed child care as the "parents' job," not a public obligation.

According to the poll, 88 percent of those who voted against the measure said they agreed with the statement "Child care should be paid for by parents, not by the whole community," and 58 percent said they voted against the measure because child care for other people's children is not their responsibility and the government shouldn't get involved.

This exit poll shows why all national public opinion polls on daycare have been so misleading. Half the Fremont voters who voted against setting up municipal daycare said that "child care is a major concern" for them.

But even though child care is a major concern, they still don't want government to assume the responsibility. Typical responses of voters, when asked why they voted down the daycare proposal, were: "Parents should take responsibility for their own kids," "We raised out kids with no tax help," and "I don't think I should pay for people's kids to be baby-sat."

The Stanford study showed that paying more taxes was not the key issue. About 82 percent agreed with the statement, "Taxes are too high already," but only 11 percent said they voted No because they oppose higher taxes.

The Stanford investigators discovered that the daycare initiative grew not from public demand, but from a city-sponsored study that had reached an erroneous conclusion. The task force calculated that there was a massive shortage of daycare in Fremont, but failed to count the majority of daycare providers – the unlicensed, neighborhood babysitters.

More and more information is coming out all the time to confirm the American people's intuition that little children are better off when taken care of at home than in government regulated daycare. The January *American Journal of Epidemiology* reported that children in daycare centers have 3.5 times the risk of diarrhea, cramps, upset stomach and other gastrointestinal illness than those kept at home.

The incidence of illness increases with group size and the length of time spent in daycare. Children who spend more than 41 hours a week in daycare have nine times the risk of children cared for at home.

The November 9 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported that a stunning 25 to 60 percent of children in daycare acquire cytomegalovirus (CMV), which may show no symptoms in toddlers but can spread to their mothers or caregivers and cause birth defects if the women are pregnant.

It is very risky, therefore, for a woman of childbearing age to be either a daycare worker of a mother who puts a child in daycare because the child may bring CMV home at night.

In reporting the Stanford study, one of the local newspapers called the Fremont child care vote “a philosophical issue.” Indeed it is. The American people oppose the whole raft of liberal federal daycare bills not primarily because they are expensive and would grow more so every year, but because they are just wrong-headed.