Pre-K Won't Help Kids

by Phyllis Schlafly

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President Obama ended his State of the Union speech on a warm-and-fuzzy note by calling for Pre-K programs for almost all children. The best thing he could do for pre-kindergarten children is to make sure he doesn't hang trillions of dollars of debt around their necks, but that isn't the route he is taking.

Instead, Obama wants to provide government daycare for all preschoolers who live in households where the income is below approximately $47,100. He doesn't call it daycare or baby-sitting (which is a more accurate term); he calls it early childhood education.

Early childhood education means programs for kids from birth to age three (a massively expanded Early Head Start, home visits by nurses, parental education, and health services), more of the existing Head Start (mostly for three-year-olds), more "high-quality pre-school" for four-year-olds available to every child in America, and full-day kindergarten for all.

Obama went to College Heights Early Childhood Learning Center near Atlanta to formally unveil his extravagant program. He said, "Let's do what works and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind."

The daycare advocates like to cite as models for success the so-called Perry Preschool Project and the Abecedarian Project. Those two projects took place a half-century ago, using highly trained teachers under optimum conditions; one project studied only 58 3- and 4-year-old children, and the other only 57.

The proclaimed purpose of Pre-K Ed is to close the gap between kids from high-income and low-income households. The defect in Obama's announcement is that there is no evidence that Pre-K schooling can or will accomplish that – it's not a program "that works."

The federal program called Head Start was created in 1965 as part of Lyndon B. Johnson's War on

Poverty. It has been running nearly 50 years, now costing $23,000 per student, and incurring a total expense of $150 billion, but it still does not provide promised benefits.

Obama likes to say he is guided by “the science,” and he claims that “study after study” shows every dollar of Pre-K “investment” (that’s the liberals’ synonym for taxes) saves seven dollars later on. Obama’s falsehood is easily refuted.

In fact, all studies show that Head Start and all the early interventions do not achieve what they promised, and any benefits “fade out” by the third grade. His own Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) did an important Head Start Impact Study tracking the progress of 3- and 4-year-olds from entering Head Start through kindergarten and first grade, and then a follow-up study on the students’ performance through the end of the third grade.

The conclusion was that Head Start had little to no effect on cognitive, social-emotional or health outcomes of participating children. The HHS report was released on the Friday before Christmas, hoping to avoid press coverage and to minimize public attention.

The principal goals of the billions of federal tax dollars poured into public schools during the George W. Bush Administration were to raise U.S. scores on international tests and to close the gap between high-income and low-income students. All that spending was a failure on both counts.

Head Start was based on the assumption that government schools can compensate children for the disadvantage of being poor. It’s time to face up to the fact that children are poor mainly because they don’t have a father provider-protector, and the problem we should address is the decline in marriage.

Obama’s Pre-K proposals are just a reprise of the perennial feminist demand for government-paid daycare. The feminists believe it’s part of the war on women by the patriarchy for society to expect mothers to care for their children, and they should be relieved of this burden by the taxpayers.

Can you believe? The feminists are still whining about President Richard Nixon’s 1971 veto of the Brademas-Mondale Comprehensive Child Development Act, which would have made daycare (now called Pre-K) a new middle class entitlement. A feminist article in the Feb. 14, 2013 New York Times claimed that Obama’s Pre-K proposal is a resurrection of Walter Mondale’s bill that was defeated under a tsunami of public opposition.

The feminists are thrilled that Obama has picked up where Mondale left off 42 years ago. Remember Mondale? He was defeated by Ronald Reagan back in 1984.

The real difference between high-achieving and low-achieving children is whether or not they live in a traditional family. There is no substitute for the enormous advantage to children of growing up in a home with their own mother and father.

A better formula for helping kids to achieve in school would be to stop giving financial handouts that operate as incentives to women to have babies without marriage.