P.S. to the NEWS
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THE FAMILY PROTECTION ACT

The White House Conference on Families has scheduled three regional conferences during 1980, in Baltimore, Minneapolis and Los Angeles. These are to be preceded by mini-conferences in each of the 50 states, which started in late 1979 and will continue during the spring of 1980.

It would be pollyanna to believe that these conferences will be harmonious gatherings of concerned Americans discussing common problems and shared objectives. The first several state meetings already show that the White House Conference will pit two fundamental ideologies against each other: the pro-federal-solution versus the solutions that tend to keep responsibility on the shoulders of families or local governments.

About the time that the state conferences got underway, Senator Paul Laxalt (R-Nv.) introduced into the Senate what he called the Family Protection Act. It is sure to be widely promoted at the various conferences by those who oppose more federal control and interference in family concerns.

The Laxalt bill's stated purpose is "to strengthen the American family and promote the virtues of family life through education, tax assistance, and related measures." It is based on the premise that "the Government has frequently fostered policies which undermine the viability of the American family, through its policies of taxation and spending," and that "a reversal of Government policies which undermine the American family is essential if the United States is to enter the twenty-first century as a strong and viable nation."

Sixteen of the 38 sections of the Family Protection Act concern education. The FPA would withhold all federal funds for education unless and until state laws are enacted or regulations promulgated that allow voluntary prayer in public buildings. The bill would also withhold funds from states which lack provisions for parental consent for student enrollment in public-school courses about religion.

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The bill would assist parents' rights to visit public school classrooms, and it asserts the right of parents and the community to review textbooks prior to their use in public schools. The bill would prevent the funding of programs and studies which are at odds with the demonstrated beliefs and values of the community (such as the controversial MACOS course).

The Family Protection Act would establish a separate tax category for parent-run schools, granting them automatic tax exemption if they fulfill certain requirements. The purpose of this provision is to ensure that the Internal Revenue Service cannot be arbitrary or capricious in granting or withdrawing tax exemption.

The bill has a number of tax provisions designed to bolster family responsibility. It would allow parents to deduct up to $2,500 of monies deposited in a special account for their child's education. It would allow a tax credit of $250 for a household which includes a dependent person 65 years of age or older.

The Family Protection Act would eliminate the so-called "marriage tax," a disincentive to marriage in the current income tax code under which married working spouses pay a higher income tax than they would pay if the same persons were living together but not married. The bill would make it clear that college students may not get food stamps when they are, in fact, voluntarily unemployed.

The Family Protection Act would create a new provision for a tax-exempt savings account for a non-employed spouse called a Retirement Savings Plan. It would work like the present IRA accounts; the money saved and the interest earned would not be taxable until the beneficiary draws it out. The bill would establish a similar procedure under which taxpayers could save money for their parents' old-age support.

The proposed legislation would prohibit the use of Legal Services Corporation funds to litigate in support of abortion funding, divorce, or homosexual rights. The taxpayers should not be required to subsidize such litigation by providing free lawyers.

Many provisions of the Family Protection Act are bound to be controversial, but they provide a good basis for constructive discussion and debate at the forthcoming White House Conference on Families.

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