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WOMEN'S CAREER CHOICE

Should federal law, programs, and funds include incentives or disincentives to induce women to make particular career choices, or to discourage them from choosing others? Senator William Armstrong (R-CO) believes that women should be allowed to select their own careers without government paternalism, "Big Brotherism," or financial inducements.

That's why he introduced the Women's Career Choice Act (S. 960) which states this principle and says furthermore that women should have "an economically realistic choice between being a career homemaker and being in the paid labor force." Among the several sections of the bill designed to achieve this goal is one which prohibits the use of federal funds under the General Education Provisions Act to discourage the pursuit of full-time homemaking as a career.

Upon hearing about this bill, some Senators expressed incredulity that there could be any need for such a statutory prohibition. Here is how the problem came about.

The word "sexism" was coined during the 1970s to parallel "racism" and to produce analogous political and cultural activism. Just as racism means discrimination against persons on account of their race, it was originally assumed that "sexism" meant discrimination against women on account of their sex.

After "sexism" was identified as a social evil to be eradicated, the U.S. Government began to budget millions of dollars annually to achieve "sex equity" in vocational education. The original purpose of these funds was to show young girls the array of career choices available to them and to "clean up" federally-produced vocational materials by eliminating prejudice against women entering nontraditional occupations.

After a couple of years, however, surveys showed that unbiased career education materials do not result in young women choosing nontraditional roles. Students continue to make traditional role choices in spite of being exposed to nonstereotypical materials.

So, those working to bring about a gender-free or sex-neutral society concluded that

it isn't sufficient to remove bias from vocational materials, but that textbook and teacher intervention is necessary to bring about role reversals and to induce youngsters to make different choices. Those working against "sexism" began to state bluntly that an unbiased career education curriculum is not enough to break down old stereotypes.

The anti-"sexism" forces began to impose on the schools the burden of counteracting the societal patterns which supposedly prevent girls from choosing nontraditional occupations. They devised career education programs to work consciously, consistently, and individually with students to overcome their tendency to make choices which could be labelled "stereotypes."

Teachers are admonished that all displays and projects should show a 50/50 representation of women and men in all occupations, and that it is the teacher's task to encourage students to choose nontraditional careers. The federally-funded National Center for Research in Vocational Education distributes materials which call upon the schools to counteract traditional societal patterns.

The anti-"sexism" forces use federally-funded publications to assert that it is "sex bias" for textbooks to include photographs and illustrations showing women and men in traditional occupational roles. In particular, the portrayal of women in the home is labelled with the ugly epithet "sex bias."

Recent federal publications sternly warn that career education materials should make no assumptions about who has the responsibility for home and child care. The authors of such guidance materials enthusiastically look forward to the day when women will participate in the labor force full time, all their lives, just like men.

And so, it came about that homemaking as a career option is completely omitted from career guidance materials. Federally-funded and federally-distributed career education materials now portray a negative attitude toward a young woman's choice of mother and homemaker as a primary career role.

The result is federally-funded materials which are grievously unfair to the young woman who wants to be a career homemaker. Homemaking is simply not presented to young women as a viable career option, and the impression is left that no woman would choose this option unless she were totally lacking in skills to choose anthing else.