Hillary Tries Touting a New Entitlement

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Hillary Rodham Clinton should have just had a birthday cake and blown out 50 candles instead of staging what a White House spokesman called a "focused comeback" to proclaim what she described as a "frontier issue." The event sounded like a typical Dick Morris ploy: proclaim a "crisis," wrap it in "children," and try to intimidate Congress into funding a new middle-class entitlement.

Her daycare "crisis" was carefully orchestrated by all the bigwigs of the Clinton Administration before an exclusive audience of about 150 in the East Room of the White House. They included government officials who can influence public policy on daycare, reporters expected to write about daycare, a few academic types paraded as "experts," and a large number of daycare providers who can be turned into lobbying troops to gather the cash spoils of federally subsidized daycare.

The audience included those two Democratic Senators who like to pose as models of fatherhood and family propriety, Senators Ted Kennedy and Chris Dodd. Conservative and pro-family leaders were excluded, but the White House did allow in two liberal Republican Members of Congress who can be relied on to endorse federal daycare.

President Clinton is demanding $300 million over five years to train 50,000 daycare workers, improve the pay of daycare workers, and direct Americorps student volunteers to look after latchkey kids. In addition, he is ordering Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin to jawbone private employers to provide free on-site daycare.

New extravagant middle-class entitlements always start out sounding harmless, voluntary, and compassionate. But make no mistake: this is the start of another grab for power like Clinton's 1994 effort to federalize the health care industry.

Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund, the chief lobby for raising children in a "village," said she hopes that Hillary's conference will be "a launching pad for significant re-

investments" in daycare. In the Clintonian lexicon, village is a synonym for government and investment is a synonym for taxes.

Conference participant Joyce Shortt, who runs a daycare organizing group, said, "As long as we are promoting an economic system where two parents or single parents work, it is the responsibility of the federal government" to promote affordable and accessible daycare. No doubt, she sees federal subsidies heading toward her bank account.

The chief guru of the federal daycare lobby is Edward Zigler, a psychology professor at Yale University and director of Yale's Bush Center for Child Development and Social Policy. He advocates a national daycare system costing $75 to $100 billion annually.

Zigler wants daycare centers reconstituted as "schools of the 21st century" and "family resource centers." He wants daycare to extend as long as the workdays of mothers and fathers, before- and after-school care, and summer care for children up to age 12.

Zigler deplores the "hodge-podge of profits, nonprofits, and family daycare homes" and the fact that 60 to 75 percent of daycares are not registered. Those with a social parenting agenda think that government can do a much better job of regulating and financing the needs of children ages 1 through 12.

A Zigler, Edelman, et al. drive for federally financed and regulated daycare is, as Yogi Berra would say, deja vu all over again. This same cast of characters carried on a tremendous national campaign for the same goal during 1988, 1989 and 1990, and they lost because Americans don't want to pay taxes to provide babysitters for other people's children.

Instead, American mothers and fathers want tax cuts so they can spend their own money and make their own decisions. The 1988-90 debate ended up with modest tax credits for children, and the Republican Congress this year provided the best and only correct federal answer to the problem of child care costs.

With the Clinton Administration dragging its feet, resisting every step of the way, this year's Republican budget included a $500 per child tax credit for children under age 17 in taxpaying families. That is a lot of new money in the pockets of 27 million families with 45 million children.

Then, Congress expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit to reach 15 million people, giving significant extra help to workers of very modest incomes. And the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit is in addition.

The Republican Congress also voted a tremendous increase in daycare spending as part of the 1996 welfare law. A new program of federal grants to the states, designating $13.9 billion over six years to fund daycare, represented an increase of more than $4 billion or nearly 50% over what would have been spent under the previous law.

The New York Times called Hillary "reborn," but her daycare proposals are just warmed over Big Government spending plans that have been exhaustively debated and rejected by the American people. Tax cuts are the best way government can help families cover the costs of raising children.