Universal child care poses threat to parental rights

by Phyllis_Schlafly

When U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., showed television viewers the Christmas presents she wants to give us if she is elected president, her most important was universal pre-kindergarten, following closely after universal health care. Clinton was reminding us of her status as the grand dame of the ideology expressed in her favorite African slogan, "It takes a village to raise a child."

Indeed, there seem to be many busybodies who believe the village, i.e., government functionaries, should make major decisions about the upbringing of children, including what they are taught and how they are medicated. They may approach this incrementally, but their goal is always "universal."

We thought it was outrageous when the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals proclaimed in the Fields v. Palmdale School District case in 2005 that the fundamental right of parents over the upbringing of their children "does not extend beyond the threshold of the school door." Now Clinton-style liberals are also acting as though parents' rights over their own children do not extend beyond the threshold of the local health clinic.

Massachusetts has just started to require that all children in Medicaid, 460,000 kids, must be subjected annually to mental health screening in order to detect signs of possible mental illness, autism, or depression. One of the criteria on the questionnaire used to identify mental health problems is that the child is "seeming to have less fun."

It's easy to predict that many children will be unfairly saddled with a false label, assigned to unnecessary and expensive treatment, and prescribed costly drugs whose effect may range from worthless to harmful. These costs to taxpayers will be expanded by the inevitable fattening of the pocketbooks of psychiatrists and psychologists.

Last year, there was considerable parental opposition to bills that were introduced into several state legislatures to require mental health screening of all children in public schools. Apparently Plan B is for the state to force the plan on Medicaid recipients, who are less likely to resist.

New Jersey just added four new vaccines to those already required of children who attend public schools, and has become the first state to require the flu vaccine. Children attending preschool or licensed day care centers must receive annual flu shots.

New Jersey regulations also require the pneumococcal vaccine for preschoolers, the meningitis vaccine for sixth-graders, and a booster shot for the diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis they already receive. Despite the protests

of many parents, including the New Jersey Alliance for Informed Choice in Vaccination, these regulations will go into effect in September 2008.

Parents believe that this New Jersey requirement is a major encroachment on parental rights to make medical and other decisions for their own children. Parents also cite the potential dangers of vaccines for some children.

Many flu vaccines and some meningitis vaccines contain the mercury-based preservative thimerosal. This is the first time that any state has mandated a vaccine containing mercury since the federal government adopted the policy in 1999 of encouraging vaccines to be mercury-free "as soon as possible."

The Food and Drug Administration advises pregnant women to avoid eating even small amounts of fish with high mercury content. But New Jersey is now demanding that 6-month-old babies be given potential mercury vaccines if they spend even one day a week in day care.

Another toxic substance, formaldehyde, is also present in the diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis and flu vaccines.

New Jersey allows exemptions from vaccines for medical or religious reasons, but some parents claim that the process of claiming an exemption is made as difficult as possible.

In Prince George's County, Md., officials used the heavy hand of government to force vaccinations. Claiming that 2,300 out of 131,000 public school students had not received their hepatitis B and chickenpox vaccines, the state began what the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons called a "heavy-handed vaccine roundup."

State's Attorney Glenn F. Ivey intimidated parents with what he called "legal action." He arranged to have letters sent to all parents who were "out of compliance" demanding that they must attend a court hearing where they would receive a verbal reprimand and their children would be vaccinated, presumably forcibly.

The letter directly threatened parents: "Unexcused absences by your child may subject you to a criminal charge." Few parents knew they could apply for medical or religious exemptions, and many believed they faced jail or heavy fines of $50 a day.

A decent respect for parental rights over medical treatment imposed on their own children should require that states allow vaccine exemptions for philosophical and conscientious reasons, in addition to medical and

religious reasons. A few states do but, unfortunately, not New Jersey or Maryland.

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