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Floor Statement on Child Care Veto

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MONDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1971

CHILD CARE VETO

Mr. MUSKIE. Mr. President, President Nixon's veto of the Comprehensive Child Development Act, as I recently said in Houston, Tex., is an affront to Americans who care for their children, and who realize that the central theme of human activity concerns the enriching and development of the coming generation.

The President has turned his back on his own promises. On February 19, 1969, he called for a "major commitment to provide all American children an opportunity for a healthful and stimulating life." On April 9, 1969, President Nixon reaffirmed his position:

I again pledge myself to that commitment.

He has reneged on that pledge.

Experts at the White House's 1970 Conference on Children convened under the President's own auspices, agreed that a comprehensive child development program such as the act contained was the single most important and desirable undertaking for the Nation's very young. The President has ignored his experts.

The President also ignored the recommendations of numerous organizations, all of them respected and respon-

sible, which represent a broad, bipartisan spectrum of American concern. These include such diverse groups as the AFL-CIO, the American Bar Association, the NAACP and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

The American people need not look far for an explanation of the President's abandonment of his commitments to them and his disregard of qualified experts and spokesmen. The President has turned his back on the public good in a blatant political appeal to the far right-wing Republican elements that are considering challenging him for his party's nomination.

The President claims that the bill would lead to an "altering of the family relationship" and that it would be a departure from the "family centered approach" to child rearing. The bill's only alteration of family relationships would have been to enrich them. Participation in the program would have been purely voluntary. The bill would have offered trained supervision to children whose mothers must leave in order to earn money to support them. It would have provided education, nutrition, and medical care to children now without it. It would have permitted the dignity of jobs and self-support to mothers now doomed to dependency on welfare because they cannot leave their children. It would have provided training in the care and education of children to parents who need assistance. And it would have augmented and strengthened the "family centered approach" to child rearing.

The President's objection to the cost of the program furnishes further sad evidence of his priorities. He would spend billions to build an SST, but objects to the cost of supporting our children. He would backstop the Lockheed Corp., but objects to the expense of providing our children with needed services.

The Comprehensive Child Development Act was a sensible and necessary investment in America's future. We are only as good a country as our citizens. We shall be only as good as the children who succeed us. Unfortunately, the administration has gone against the will of Congress and has not grasped this opportunity for enriching and uplifting our children for the ultimate betterment of our Nation.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Washington Post's Sunday editorial on the day care veto be printed in the Record. I think it provides an excellent analysis of the President's actions.

There being no objection, the editorial was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

[From the Washington Post, Dec. 12, 1971]

THE PRESIDENT'S VETO OF DAY CARE

President Nixon's veto message to Congress explaining why he disapproves of the Child Development Act is, just to begin with, weird. It is weird because it is contradictory, arguing first that day care centers are good and then that they are evil. The contradiction points only to one possible conclusion: that this message is a bone he has tossed to his critics on the far right, with next November in mind, and at the expense of mothers and children and of a day care program which the President would have us believe he really supports.

The President's straddle comes about because day care centers are an integral part of his welfare reform program. His plan, sent to Congress two years ago, included a request for \$750 million for funds to provide day care for children of poor families so their mothers can work. Indeed, it required that ultimately welfare mothers with children over age 3 put those children in day care centers and take jobs, providing both the centers and the jobs are available. This provision, as we have pointed out before, is largely window dressing as things are, since neither the centers nor the jobs exist, but it is the enticement the President used in trying to win right-wing support for welfare reform. In his veto message Thursday, the President called again for passage of that welfare day care program, saying that it would fill one of the needs of the country, a need "for day care, to enable mothers, particularly those at the lowest income levels, to take full-time jobs."

Now, if that were all Mr. Nixon had done in favor of day care, it would be fair to conclude from his veto message that he is for requiring poor people to put their children in such centers but against permitting middle-class people to do so. But it isn't all he did. The President also used the veto message to announce his support for substantial increases in the income tax deductions that parents who are working can claim for day care expenses. This is a clear encouragement to middle-class parents to use day care centers and go to work.

Having thus put himself on the record in favor of day care—an issue about which many organized groups in the country feel strongly—Mr. Nixon then vetoed the bill which would have given a much needed spur to day care development. This bill, he said, is "the most radical piece of legislation" to come out of this Congress. You might expect, once he had said that, that he would offer an explanation of how this particular day care program differed so much from those he supports. The President did list nine specific objections. Five of them are complaints that this bill would partially duplicate services he hopes to provide in the welfare bill, would give the states too minor a role, would cost too much, would create "a new army of bureaucrats," and would create centers which would be difficult to staff. Since there is nothing "radical" in those specifics—we hear them all the time about almost every piece of legislation—the radicalness of this particular bill must lie in his other objections. They are:

"Neither the immediate need nor the desirability of a national child development of this character has been demonstrated." . . .

"For more than two years this administration has been working for the enactment of welfare reform, one of the objectives of which is to bring the family together. This child development program appears to move in precisely the opposite direction. There is a respectable school of opinion that this legislation would lead toward altering the family relationship . . .

"All other factors being equal, good public policy requires that we enhance rather than diminish both parental authority and parental involvement with children—particularly in those decisive early years when social attitudes and a conscience are formed, and religious and moral principles are first inculcated . . .

"For the federal government to plunge headlong financially into supporting child development would commit the vast moral authority of the national government to the side of communal approaches to child rearing over against the family-centered approach."

We do not find in this one word that distinguishes the day care program Mr. Nixon vetoed from the day care program he is supporting. His specifics apply to all child care facilities and it is logically impossible to

square his assertion that we need to enhance parental involvement with children with his program to compel welfare mothers to put their children in day care centers. Perhaps he did not distinguish between the programs because drawing such distinctions is difficult.

That is what convinces us that this veto message is the bone he has decided to throw to the right wing of his party. If it were not, Mr. Nixon could have vetoed this bill on the other specific objections he set out—it would, for instance, create major administrative problems—and Congress could have met them. But as it is, the President chose to kill the whole idea by spelling out his veto in language that comes straight from the material circulated against this bill by the far right, language that distorts what the bill was all about and what it would have done.