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Republicans Have Family under Attack **by Sheldon Richman**

Anyone who still believes that the people and the government are the same thing ought to think about what a House-Senate conference committee refused to do recently. Thanks to Texas Congressman Ron Paul, the committee had the opportunity to strike a blow for the rights of parents and for other family values.

But it refused.

As the committee was working on the mammoth omnibus spending bill, which contains all kinds of pork-barrel favors, Representative Paul sought to have language added to prohibit money from being spent on the psychiatric examination of children without parental consent. The proposed addition said,

“None of the funds made available for State Incentive Grants for Transformation should be used for any programs of mandatory or universal mental-health screening that perform mental-health screening on anyone under 18 years of age without the express, written permission of the parents or legal guardians of each individual involved.”

Paul, a medical doctor, had a good reason to see this statement included. President Bush supports the recommendation by his New Freedom Commission on Mental Health that all adults and children be screened for so-called mental and emotional disorders by primary-care physicians and schools. As reported previously, similar programs have been adopted at the state level at the behest of large drug companies, which stand to gain handsomely from wider prescription of potent psychiatric drugs.

The House leadership and many members supported the inclusion of Paul’s spending prohibition. But key members of the Senate balked, particularly Majority Leader Bill Frist, also a doctor, and Sen. Arlen Specter. It was not the first time that Paul tried to scuttle government-sponsored psychiatric screening, and he vows to raise the issue again in the new session that begins in January.

The idea that children should be routinely examined for mental illness at school and possibly drugged without their parents’ consent is something out of a horrifying science-fiction

novel in which a totalitarian state runs everything. Critics of government schooling have long warned that political control of education is an affront to the family and would lead to further usurpation of its authority. The widespread prescription of Ritalin for so-called attention-deficit disorder was only the beginning. In 2002 Bush appointed the Orwellian-named New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, which last year issued its recommendations for universal screening. The commission claimed that mental illness is underdiagnosed and lamented that so many people have no access to the new allegedly therapeutic drugs that are available. But underneath this apparent compassion are some unattractive truths.

First, what people think of as mental disorders are in fact actions and statements that others find disturbing. Attributing behavior to disease is no way to teach children self-responsibility. Second, psychiatric drugs can do serious harm. The proposal that children be subjected to stigmatizing diagnoses and dangerous “therapy” without parental consent should be revolting to everyone. When Americans really valued their freedom, they understood that the family was an institutional bulwark against oppressive government. Today the family is regularly shunted aside so that tax-funded social engineers can work their experiments.

There is irony in what’s happening. Bush’s reelection has been interpreted as a victory for “moral values.” While that analysis is grossly oversimplified, many people have the sense that Republicans hold the family sacrosanct while the Democrats have other priorities.

Bush’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health tells us that this distinction is a mirage. The Republican White House and Senate are as antagonistic to the integrity of the family as Hillary Clinton and Ted Kennedy are.

The Democrats have an opportunity to begin the rehabilitation they so badly need by denouncing the Bush commission’s proposals and vowing that they will not be written into law. But don’t hold your breath. The Democrats are as much in the thrall of the politically correct mental-health establishment as their Republican counterparts.

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