



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on February 10, 2013

Obama-linked Think Tank Wants Universal Preschool, More Child-care Subsidies

With the federal government already running annual deficits in excess of \$1 trillion, a liberal think tank is calling on Uncle Sam to spend hundreds of billions more on “universal preschool” and child care — a proposal that could well make its way into President Barack Obama’s impending State of the Union address.



The Center for American Progress (CAP), which the [Associated Press](#) describes as “an influential partner for the White House in fleshing out its policies,” released its [proposal](#) on February 7. The plan calls for Washington to spend almost \$200 billion over the next 10 years, followed by nearly \$25 billion each year thereafter, to “make high-quality preschool universally accessible to all 3- and 4-year-old children” and to “enable more lower-income families to afford child care for children ages 0-3 years old.”

The first part of the CAP’s proposal:

All children ages 3 and 4 should be able to voluntarily attend a full-day public preschool program. Preschool should be free for children from families at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line (\$46,100 for a family of four). Children from families above 200 percent of the poverty line should be charged a sliding tuition co-pay, ranging from about 30 percent of the cost to 95 percent of the cost (for families above 400 percent of the poverty line).

Besides the cost to taxpayers, estimated at \$98.4 billion over the first 10 years and \$12.3 billion in each subsequent year, there are a number of troubling things in this part of the plan.

First, note the emphasis on *public* preschool. The objective clearly is to get as many children into the clutches of the state educational system as early as possible. As the CAP observed elsewhere in its proposal, “Years of research demonstrate that the first five years of a child’s cognitive and emotional development establish the foundation for learning and achievement throughout life.” The sooner the government can begin molding the minds of children, the more likely they are to grow up to be compliant, subservient cogs in the state’s machinery rather than free-thinking, self-reliant individuals.

Second, the notion that preschool should be “free” or even partially subsidized implies that parents of preschoolers have a prior claim on the earnings of others.

Third, the fact that even families making over four times the poverty line qualify for subsidies means that all parents who choose to send their children to preschool — a number that will surely increase



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when it is subsidized — will become beholden to Washington. That, too, ensures a compliant populace. The money doled out by the federal government under this proposal is intended to match state spending on preschool, which means taxpayers will be soaked for preschool subsidies twice. It also means that Washington will impose more dictates on states, and the CAP is not lacking for suggestions in that department, either. Among other things, it recommends requiring states to “offer full-day kindergarten” (more time for kids to be shaped by the state), to bring down teacher-child ratios and class sizes (more public employees and buildings), and to “develop early learning guidelines for literacy, numeracy, and *social and emotional development*” (more opportunities for the government to intrude on parental prerogatives).

Those providers eligible to receive the money “should include local education agencies (school districts, charter schools), Head Start programs, child care agencies, and community-based providers of prekindergarten programs in partnership with local education agencies,” according to the CAP. This, the AP suggests, is “a concession that could win over Republicans who want more options for parents.”

The second part of the CAP’s proposal is to expand child-care subsidies and Early Head Start, a program for pregnant women and families with low incomes.

“Specifically,” writes the think tank, “the federal government would offer states substantially higher grant amounts through the Child Care and Development Fund, or CCDF, on the condition that they spend \$1 for every \$3 the federal government spends.” This is expected to double the number of families on the child-care dole at a 10-year cost of \$84.2 billion with a maintenance cost of \$10.5 billion in each subsequent year. And taxpayers would again take a hit — to the tune of a third of these prices — at the state level.

This, too, would enable more federal control over state functions. The CAP would have Washington impose child-care standards on states and “implement a Quality Rating and Improvement System ... for their federally funded child care programs.”

The CAP also wants to “double enrollment in Early Head Start,” which would cost \$11.5 billion over 10 years and \$1.44 billion each year thereafter. Since the program begins working with families before a child is even born, it essentially gives the *government* an early head start on turning out compliant citizens. The program’s [website](#) states that Early Head Start even includes home visits by government employees, “especially for families with newborns” — a golden opportunity either to force parents to do as the state says or to take their child from them. Then there are “parent education” and “comprehensive health and mental health services,” which are also fraught with dangers.

All told, the CAP proposals would cost taxpayers at the federal level alone nearly \$200 billion in their first decade, with billions more in the decades to come; and as with most estimates of government programs, they will probably end up costing far more.

Clearly, all of this spending is unconstitutional. But even if it were constitutional, would it be wise at a time when the U.S. Treasury is running astronomical deficits?

According to the “progressives” at the CAP, the answer is yes. “This concern [over deficits] is understandable but misplaced. Studies show that investing money in high-quality preschool will actually improve our country’s fiscal health by strengthening human capital, enhancing economic growth, increasing revenues, and decreasing future spending obligations.” Why, even Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke agrees with them on this, they point out. And Bernanke, of course, has never been wrong about anything.



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Then again, even CAP president and CEO Neera Tanden admitted in remarks to the AP that the alleged payoff won't occur for "10 or 20 years." Can the federal government really afford to pile on more debt for another couple of decades in hopes of reaping some ephemeral future savings?

Will the CAP's proposal wind up in Obama's State of the Union speech? Certainly the administration seems to be thinking along these lines already. According to the AP, "Education Department officials, including Secretary Arne Duncan, have signaled that pre-kindergarten programs would be a priority during Obama's second term." Tanden herself is a former high-level adviser in the Obama administration (as well as in Obama's 2008 presidential campaign), which suggests that she has a good feel for what the president wants and the connections to get the CAP's proposal before his eyes. The AP observes that "seldom does the organization move too far or too quickly ahead of White House priorities."

If Obama does propose these costly, worrisome, and unconstitutional initiatives, Congress should hold its applause. A poor reception just might convince him not to bother sending any such bills to Capitol Hill.



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