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National Child Care Awareness Week, 1988

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Caring for children is the primary responsibility of a parent. It is the task around which family life is organized, a major factor in every decision parents make about their own and their family's future, from choice of jobs and schools and neighborhoods to the selection of books, films, and every other form of instructional material or entertainment that will influence the development of the child's character and personality. Child care is also an organizing principle of society, for it is the primary means of transmitting knowledge, traditions, and moral and religious values from one generation to the next.

Sound public policy must support the family in its mission of child care. To do so effectively, public policy must increase and strengthen, not narrow and dilute, the variety of child care options open to families. It must help ensure that child care serves as an adjunct and buttress to parental guidance and love; that it reflects as far as possible the actual preferences of parents for the personal care of their precious offspring; and that it is inherently flexible, to avoid the establishment of practices or programs that defeat these ends and undermine either the well-being of children or the health of the economy.

Heightened interest in child care is a result of tremendous growth and change in the U.S. work force. Between 1982 and 1986, American business created two and one-half times as many new jobs as Japan and the major industrial countries of Europe combined. Our country is well into its sixth consecutive year of expansion—a peacetime record. Women, particularly, are moving into the salaried labor force in large numbers, and their unemployment rate has dropped nearly a full percentage point in the past year alone. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly half of all mothers with a child under one year of age work. Today one family in six is headed by a single, divorced, or widowed woman.

Americans have responded to these changes in a number of ways, reflecting the many options parents desire and need. Family members—a sibling or grandparents—and students provide both full- and part-time day care. Churches have developed effective day care programs that supplement custodial care with the religious atmosphere many parents seek. State-licensed facilities managed by public agencies or private entities have rapidly expanded, as have corporate child care programs. Moreover, the landmark tax reform bill I signed in 1986 included a provision beneficial to all families facing child care decisions: the near doubling—to \$2,000 by 1989, with indexing thereafter—of the per-child personal exemption. This measure has restored at least a fraction of the exemption's original worth to families and more realistically reflects the rising cost of caring for children.

To be fair to all families, child care policy analysis must recognize the contributions of women who work, those who would prefer to work part-time rather than full-time jobs, and homemakers who forego employment income altogether to raise children at home. Surely all of these are "working mothers." As policy options are reviewed and implemented, we must also continue to assess carefully the growing body of research data on the effects of various forms of child care on the emotional, psychological, and intellectual development of children.

I ask all Americans to join with me in honoring the parents, relatives, schools, churches, and institutional child care providers who take on the enormously important task of child care. Theirs is a sacred trust gladly assumed for the future of our Nation. National Child Care Awareness Week affords us a welcome opportunity to offer them recognition and encouragement.

The Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 280, has designated the week beginning April 10, 1988, as "National Child Care Awareness Week" and authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this week.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the week beginning April 10, 1988, as National Child Care Awareness Week.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this eleventh day of April, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twelfth.

Ronald Reagan