

The Children's Charter

By Bill Hobby

Instead of searching for code words and themes that divide the nation, we must find the principles that unite us. Since the Republican convention begins in Houston next week, we think it appropriate to seek inspiration from former Republican initiatives.

Not long ago, Professor George Silver of Yale reminded us of the Children's Charter. Here are some of the rights enunciated in the Children's Charter:

- For every child a home, and that love and security which a home provides; and for that child who must receive foster care, the nearest substitute for his own home;
- For every child full preparation for his birth; his mother receiving prenatal, natal and post natal care;
- For every child health protection from birth through adolescence:
- For every child a dwelling place safe, sanitary and wholesome;
- For every child a school which is safe from hazards, sanitary, properly equipped, lighted and ventilated. For younger children nursing schools and kindergartens to supplement home care;
- For every child an education which, through the discovery and development of his individual abilities, prepares him for life; and through training and vocational guidance, prepares him for a living which will yield him the maximum satisfaction;
- For every child who is in conflict with society, the right to be dealt with intelligently as society's charge, not society's outcast
- For EVERY child these rights, regardless of race, or color, or situation, wherever he may live under the protection of the American flag.

This charter came out of the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection in 1930, and was endorsed by President Herbert Hoover. He actively promoted the charter, and while he saw only a limited role for the federal government, the principles and the approach resonate very deeply today.

Similarly, in housing, a bipartisan initiative passed the Housing Act of 1949, which authorized, among many other provisions, the building of 810,000 low income housing units.

It was because Ohio Senator Robert Taft, "Mr. Republican", had devoted the prior six years to researching and advocating the construction of public housing that this bipartisan effort was possible.

He was concerned that with rent supplements, too high a proportion of the funds would go to the landlord and not enough to provision of housing. Indeed, in a speech in New York in 1949, he said, "I have found no alternative to public housing as a method of providing low income rentals to those at the bottom of the income scale."

In education, President Eisenhower proposed federal aid to schools developed by his Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Oveta Culp Hobby. Those proposals were dramatically greater in scope and scale than the limited programs then in place.

The President in 1972 called for a National Health Insurance Standards Act, which would require that employers provide adequate health insurance for their employees and a federal health insurance plan for poor and unemployed persons not covered by the National Health Insurance Standards Act. This President also called for regulation of private insurers so that they would perform as required and that insurance would be offered at reasonable rates. He also proposed to require states to provide group rate coverage for the self-employed and other special groups. As you may have guessed, that President was Richard Nixon.

His Employee Health Care Insurance plan of 1974 differed very little from the proposals Senator Kennedy made in 1989, variants of which the current Administration has castigated as too expensive and costing jobs.

The nations of Western Europe do much more to address these problems than we do. They spend more on elementary and secondary education. They develop universal and easily accessible prenatal and pediatric care. They have universal health care systems that cost much less. And they spend far less on prisons and detention facilities.

Don't most Americans believe in rights for children, in better education, in affordable health care and housing for the homeless?

Historically, the Republican party has advocated no less.

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