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THE WHITE HOUSE AT WORK:**Thursday, April 17, 1997****TODAY: PRESIDENT AND FIRST LADY HOLD EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE**

Today at the White House, the President and First Lady host "The White House Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning: What New Research on the Brain Tells Us About Our Youngest Children."

- The President said in his State of the Union address, "learning begins in the first days of life...scientists are now discovering how young children develop emotionally and intellectually from their very first days, and how important it is for parents to begin immediately talking, singing, even reading to their infants."
- Today's Conference brings together esteemed scientists, doctors, sociologists, parents and other experts to examine how we can use this new research in practical ways -- to be better parents and care-givers, and to raise stronger families.
- Participants at the White House will be joined by satellite by thousands of people at more than 80 sites around the country.

This morning, the President announces new actions to improve the early development of America's children:

- The President asks the Defense Department -- which runs a model child care program -- to "adopt" civilian child care centers, helping them improve quality and become accredited, sharing information on how to operate successfully, and working with state and local government training programs to help people moving off welfare to become child care workers.
- The President announces an upcoming White House Conference on Child Care.
- The President expands Early Head Start enrollment by one-third for next year; and to help parents and care givers teach the very young, a new "Ready, Set, Read" Early Childhood Development Activity Kit will go out to early childhood programs across the country as part of the President's America Reads challenge.
- The President announces new Child Victims of Violence Initiative, to train police, prosecutors, probation and parole officers and mental health

professionals in child development, so they are better able to help young children who are victims of violence.

- The President calls for his Children's Health Initiative, to extend health care to as many as 5 million uninsured children by 2000.

Early Childhood Conference
April 16, 1997

What:

The White House Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning: What the Newest Research on the Brain tells us about our youngest children

When:

First session: 10:30 am to 1:00pm

Flotus will open, introduce the President, he will make brief remarks, introduce the panelists. This session will be devoted to experts in childhood development and learning.

For the most part, they are scientists, and doctors.

Lunch in the State Dining Room for panel participants, Potus will make remarks, but it is closed.

Second session: 3:00pm to 4:30pm

This session will highlight model programs from several sectors of the community -- business, law enforcement, entertainment. They will talk about how they are using this new information on childhood and the brain.

What:

There will be several policy announcements from the President.

Where:

East Room

Coverage:

InHouse Pool Coverage, plus a media affairs pool on a rotating basis.

Audio will be available all day long on the mults in the briefing room if reporters wish to hear it.

The first session will be broadcast via satellite in 26 states where similar conferences are being held.

Who:

150 guests, 15 panelists

Sample panelists:

First Session

Dr. Carla Schatz, UC Berkeley

Dr. Ezra Davidson, Drew University of Medicine

Dr. T. Terry Brazelton, Harvard University

Second Session

Harriet Meyer, Ounce of Prevention, Chicago

Arnold Langbo, Kellogg's CEO

Melvin Wearing, New Haven Police Chief

Rob Reiner, Castlerock Entertainment

WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. What will be discussed at the conference?

The conference will highlight new research on brain development in very young children and discuss what it means for parents, caregivers and policy makers. We now know that children's earliest experiences actually effect the development of their brains and are essential to their ability to learn, develop, and reach their full potential. This conference will be a call to action to all members of society -- including the business, faith and health communities, the media, child care providers and government -- to use this information to strengthen America's families.

Q. Will the President make any major policy announcements at the conference?

This conference builds on the Administration's commitment to children and to early learning and development. To take just a few examples, the Administration increased participation in Head Start and created Early Head Start for children under the age of four, increased participation in the WIC Supplemental Nutrition Program, and helped raise the rate of childhood immunization to record highs.

I'm not going to talk specifically about the announcements that the President will make tomorrow. He will announce new Administration policy proposals, and he'll talk about next steps that we can all take to improve our children's chances to reach their potential. The conference is a call to action to all members of society -- including policy makers, parents, teachers, businesses, and the media -- to use the new information we have about early childhood development to support children and families.

Q. What kind of impact do you expect this conference to have?

The conference will highlight new information showing that children's earliest experiences affect the actual development of their brains and their ability to learn, grow, and reach their full potential. It is the beginning of what we hope will be national dialogue on how best to support, stimulate, and nurture children in their earliest years.

Q. How can the President reconcile his interest in early childhood development with the fact that he signed a welfare bill that will throw over a million children into poverty?

The President signed welfare reform because he believes that we need to end the cycle of dependency and help all Americans take responsibility for their own lives. The President believes -- and all the evidence suggests -- that children who grow up in households and communities where there's work will be far better off in the long run than those who don't. The welfare bill dramatically expanded the availability of child care for people moving from welfare to work, while preserving the health, safety and other quality standards for child care.

This conference is about what we need to do to support **all** families -- those that are moving from welfare to work as well as those who have been struggling to hold down jobs. We need to help all parents afford quality child care. That's why the President has proposed expansions of the Earned Income Tax Credit and a \$500 per child tax credit. And we need to help all families understand the importance of stimulating and nurturing their children in their earliest years.

Q. Doesn't this new research mean that women should stay home?

No. What the research suggests is that we should support all parents, those who work outside the home and those who don't. There are terrifically engaged parents who go to work, and there are parents who stay home but don't know or chose to spend time talking, reading and singing to their children. A recent report indicates that children in quality child care settings do just as well as children whose mothers stay home. What's most important is that children are surrounded by loving, nurturing caregivers who understand the importance of the first few years of life.