

Two Candidates to Roll Out Domestic Proposals

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Two presidential candidates plan to unveil significant domestic policy proposals today, with Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton calling for a \$5 billion plan for universal prekindergarten classes and Senator John McCain urging more efficiency and ethics in government.

Mrs. Clinton, Democrat of New York, will visit an elementary school in Miami today to propose her first major education initiative of the campaign: a federal fund to help states create or expand universal pre-K programs.

The program would be voluntary for states, which would be required to provide a dollar-for-dollar match and would not be allowed to reduce their current spending on pre-K, according to a summary of the plan provided yesterday by the Clinton campaign.

States would also be required to hire teachers with bachelor's degrees and training in early childhood development; establish standards and curriculums devised for early learning; and maintain low teacher-child ratios in the program. The money could also be used to expand Head Start programs.

During the first five years of the program, the federal commitment would increase to \$10 billion as states spend more on pre-K.

“Every child — not just children whose parents can afford it — should have the same chance to succeed and to fulfill his or her God-given potential,” Mrs. Clinton said yesterday in a statement. A 2004 study in New York, by **Clive R. Belfield** of Queens College, found that offering universal prekindergarten to all children in the state would save up to \$828 million over the course of their educations from kindergarten through 12th grade. The savings would come as a result of the reduced need for remedial services and reduced repetition of grades.

Dozens of states, including New York and New Jersey, and several cities have taken steps to establish and finance prekindergarten programs, but only a handful of states, including Florida, Georgia and Oklahoma, have extensive prekindergarten classes.

Mrs. Clinton, a lawyer by training, has focused on children's issues for decades, beginning her career at the Yale Child Study Center, serving on the board of the Children's Defense Fund, and writing a best-selling book, “It Takes a Village,” that espoused communal, collaborative approaches to nurturing and educating children.

Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, a professor and specialist in early childhood education at Columbia University, said Mrs. Clinton's proposal struck the right balance by having states manage pre-K programs while involving the federal government in a much-needed financial role.

“The dollar-for-dollar match is especially key here,” Professor Brooks-Gunn said, “because it will make clear that the programs will still be run at the state level, and it will be an incentive for states that haven’t invested heavily in pre-K.”

Mr. McCain, meanwhile, plans to veer away from the government-is-the-problem school of conservatism as he outlines his vision of government in a speech today to the Oklahoma State Legislature. The senator, an Arizona Republican, plans to speak of the need for more ethics and efficiency in government.

“In my administration, public disclosure will be constant, timely and widely available,” Mr. McCain said, in excerpts of the speech obtained from his campaign. “Ethical standards will be subject to frequent review. Every inspector general in every department of government will have direct access to the heads of their departments and cabinet secretaries. And I’ll hold those senior officeholders directly responsible for taking the necessary corrective measures to ensure the integrity of the departments they lead.”

Once again, Mr. McCain will criticize the Bush administration’s response to Hurricane Katrina, and pledge to do better. In the speech excerpts, he said, “U.P.S., FedEx and Wal-Mart can tell in real time where a package is anywhere in the world, but FEMA, despite its multibillion-dollar budget, couldn’t track many of its assets during its Katrina response, needlessly delaying help to our citizens.”