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Gephardt pledges Head Start cash

By Jack Loftus 11/4/03

DURHAM - Sen. Dick Gephardt, D-Mo., spoke Monday in Huddleston Hall at the University of New Hampshire as the first of three candidates to appear in the final day of the Every Child Matters Presidential Primary Forums.

Gephardt, who grew up in a "modest, poor household," attributed his success to "two wonderful parents who loved me and wanted me to succeed," in addition to quality teachers and education.

To strengthen prekindergarten and elementary schools, Gephardt pledged to return Head Start to a fully federally funded program.

"The last thing we need to do is make it a locally run program," said Gephardt, whose daughter teaches early childhood education in Maryland.

Every Child Matters President Michael Petit, sharing the responsibility of asking questions with WMUR-TV 9 political director Scott Spradling, wished to know how Gephardt would protect the three million children currently in foster care because of neglect or abuse.

"This is a forgotten problem; it was kind of swept under the carpet," Gephardt said. "What we need to do is expand the Violence Against Women Act to include violence against children."

Gephardt also said there was a need to educate the judicial system and law-enforcement agencies to incorporate violence against children.

The Missouri senator described the health-care problem in America as an "epidemic with no bounds."

"My health-care plan is the only plan that helps everybody; I will say to employers 'you must supply health care to all employees'," he said.

In return, businesses would receive 60 percent refundable tax credits. The plan would affect part-time employees as well as full-time ones, Gephardt said.

To pay for his health plan, Gephardt first said he would eliminate the Bush tax cuts.

"You have a choice: Bush tax cuts or health care," Gephardt said. "My plan would provide

\$2,000 to \$3,000 per family per year."

Answering a question of after-school care, Gephardt said that whatever is done for students will be better than sending a child home to an empty house.

"Schools need to adapt; the federal government needs to help more than they are," he said.

To strengthen a child's education, Gephardt proposed a TeacherCorps, much like the AmeriCorps program from the Clinton era. Modeled like the ROTC program, TeacherCorps would pay college loans for students who taught where the government directed them for a period of five years.

Citing his rise from poverty and the role that quality parenting and education played in the success, Gephardt said he was the example of the American Dream.

"I did not do it on my own, I had a lot of help," he said, pledging that Americans will receive the same help, ensuring "nobody is left out, and nobody is left behind."