

Clinton knows: in the new economy, caring is crucial^[1]

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Source: The Guardian

Format: Article

Publication Date: 8 Sep 2016

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Hillary Clinton's political brand is mainstream, incremental and pragmatic. She presents herself as "the progressive who wants to get things done", a tagline that emphasizes the need to sacrifice grand visions on the altar of results. She may prioritize reform over revolution, but she is also the candidate of much bigger ideas than is typically recognized.

One of these touches the heart of government itself: the role of the state. The modern state was created to protect its citizens; although the line between defending citizens from one another and foreign invaders and waging war as a foreign invader was blurry at best. As the sociologist Charles Tilly wrote: "War made the state and the state made war." The state thus created was the "fiscal-military state". In Manuel Lin-Miranda's rap retelling of precisely this struggle between Hamilton and Jefferson: "If we assume the debts, the union gets a new line of credit, a financial diuretic; If we're aggressive and competitive the union gets a boost."

Over the course of the 20th century, in part because of the depredations of wars and economic depressions triggered by adventures and miscalculations of fiscal-military states, government as protector also become government as provider. In *The Fourth Revolution*, John Micklethwaite and Adrian Woolridge chronicle the evolution of the night-watchman state into the nanny state, even as they call for another revolution – this one to decouple "democracy from elephantiasis" and end the "supersizing of the state".

A perusal of Hillary Clinton's policy positions may not satisfy these criteria, but they do offer view of the state that is neither night-watchman or nanny: government as investor. The rhetoric of investment is everywhere. Policies to create jobs and raise wages, for instance, are described as part of the American tradition of "bipartisan investments in our future". She calls for massive infrastructure investment, as well as research investments, most notably in clean energy, all of which are government's most traditional investor roles.

She is also recommending major investments in human capital. Family policy is typically a backwater for politicians, but for Clinton it is central. She headlines her commitment to early childhood education with a sentence that she used repeatedly as secretary of state: "Every child deserves the chance to live up to his or her God-given potential."

That is not just a platitude. It's an investment philosophy. As for a venture capitalist, it is impossible to know which investments in a portfolio will pay off, only that it is necessary to seed as many as possible to find the winners and the steady earners. Government must invest in all citizens to harvest the full range of potential growth, knowledge, creativity, grit and resilience a society requires. As we now know, investing in children in the first five years of their lives, a period of intense brain development, determines not just how much they know at age five but how much and how well they will be able to learn for the rest of their lives.

Government must also invest in the ability of citizens to care for each other, largely through families, but also with the help of skilled paid caregivers. Clinton would increase "investments in childcare" such that no family has to pay more than 10% of its income to afford high-quality care. She supports paid family and medical leave of 12 weeks for every American and would raise wages and improve working conditions for childcare and eldercare workers. These jobs and services are part of "the caring economy", one that will only grow as baby boomers age and millennials begin to have children of their own.

Clinton may find support for her vision of government in an unexpected place: Silicon Valley. Technology reporter Gregory Ferenstein has polled leading Silicon Valley entrepreneurs and concluded that they "want the government to be an investor in citizens, rather than as a protector from capitalism". In the words of the Alphabet chairman, Eric Schmidt, "the combination of innovation, empowerment, and creativity will be our solution."

The world that all of our children will enter, indeed that we ourselves must navigate in the coming decades, is whirling too fast and too unpredictably for any government to credibly promise either absolute protection or comprehensive provision of services. It can and will continue to do some of each. But its best bet is to cultivate talent and build resilience, investing in both individuals and families to allow them to take care of themselves and one another. Those investments must be substantial and long-term, but countries will not be able to compete without an infrastructure of care.

-reprinted from The Guardian

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