

Election '08: Candidates pledge support for working families

Comparing the plans of Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and John Edwards
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The candidates' proposals are ordered based on date of release.

| Expand the Family & Medical Leave Act: | | | |
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| Current Provisions: | | | |
| <p>The FMLA provides up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for childbirth and infant care, an employee's own serious health condition, or to care for a spouse, parent, or child with a serious health condition. The FMLA presently covers workers who 1) work for a business with 50 or more employees, 2) have worked for the same employer for 12 months, and 3) have worked a minimum of 1250 hours in the 12 months prior to leave-taking. Only 60 percent of U.S. workers are both covered and eligible for FMLA leave. Some state family and medical leave laws provide additional protections, including coverage for workers in businesses with less than 50 employees, longer periods of job-protected leave, and/or expanding caretaking leave to cover domestic partners or extended family.</p> | | | |
| Hillary Clinton | Barack Obama | John Edwards | Notes: |
| <p>Expand FMLA to cover businesses with 25 or more employees.</p> | <p>Expand FMLA to cover businesses with 25 or more employees;</p> <p>Expand provisions for elder care leave (details not specified);</p> <p>Allow parents to take up to 24 hours of leave each year for children's academic activities;</p> <p>Allow leave to care for individuals who have lived in employee's household for six months or more</p> <p>Allow workers to take leave related to domestic violence and sexual assault against themselves, their children or their parents.</p> | <p>Expand FMLA to cover business with 25 or more employees</p> <p>Cover more part-time workers.</p> | <p>Only Obama's proposal explicitly expands FMLA to parents who need time off for children's school activities and workers who need time to care for partners and family members who are not covered under the current law.</p> |

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| Creating Paid Family & Medical Leave: | | | |
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| Current Provisions: | | | |
| <p>The United States is the only wealthy nation in the world which does not guarantee paid childbirth leave. Of the 169 countries world-wide that provide paid childbirth leave, 98 (58 percent) offer more than 14 weeks of paid, job-protected leave. Many high-income countries also provide paid paternal leave and paid leave for long-term illness. Across the U.S., only 8 percent of all private sector workers, and 5 percent of low-income workers, have access to paid maternity leave through their employers. In the states, only California has successfully implemented paid parental leave. Washington State passed a bill guaranteeing 5 weeks of paid parental leave In 2007-- but state legislators must develop and approve a funding mechanism by 2009, and opponents are working to delay implementation of the bill.</p> <p>Recent studies suggest that longer, paid childbirth leaves reduce infant mortality and improve developmental outcomes, while shorter, unpaid leaves do not.</p> | | | |
| Hillary Clinton | Barack Obama | John Edwards | Notes: |
| <p>Will commit 1 billion dollars to a Family Leave Innovation Fund to encourage development of state-level leave programs, with the goal of having all states provide coverage by 2016. Clinton's plan would "support all approaches to providing more leave to employees including through Temporary Disability Insurance or Unemployment Insurance programs, expansion of direct support programs like At Home Infant Care, or through individual and business tax credits."</p> | <p>Will commit 1.5 billion dollars to assist states with start-up costs of adopting paid leave systems and provide states with technical assistance through the Department of Labor.</p> | <p>Will create a 2 billion dollar National Family Trust to assist states with developing paid leave programs, with the goal of having all states provide coverage by 2014. Rather than subsidizing tax credits or employer incentives, the National Family Trust will support states that offer minimum benefits, including 8 weeks of leave for new parents. Edwards will also make the federal government a model employer with a generous paid leave benefit.</p> | <p>Of the leading Democratic candidates' plans, only Edwards' proposal comes close to assuring that employees who need family and medical leave will have access to an adequate duration of leave. To be effective as a substitute for a national family leave insurance program, federal guidelines for state-level initiatives must limit the use of funds for private sector incentives, assure that state leave programs cover the same instances leave taking allowed under the FMLA, and establish a federal baseline for minimum leave length and wage replacement rates.</p> |

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| Paid Sick Days: | | | |
| <p>Current Provisions: World-wide, 145 countries provide paid sick days for short- or long-term illness, with 136 providing a week or more annually. In the United States, sick days are provided at employers' discretion, and employers who offer paid sick days to professional and managerial employees as part of a benefits package are not required to provide sick days to all workers. Half of all private sector workers, and three-quarters of low-wage workers, do not have a single day of paid sick leave, and 80 percent of private sector workers do not have a single day of paid sick leave that can be used to care for a sick child.</p> | | | |
| Hillary Clinton | Barack Obama | John Edwards | Notes: |
| Guarantee a minimum of seven paid sick days annually. | Guarantee a minimum of seven paid sick days annually. | Guarantee a minimum of seven paid sick days annually; Extend coverage to part-time workers. | The candidates' proposals are consistent with the legislative goals of the Healthy Families Act. |
| Prevent Family Responsibilities Discrimination in the Workplace: | | | |
| <p>Current Provisions: No federal law explicitly prohibits employer discrimination based on family status or responsibilities, but current laws prohibiting pregnancy and gender discrimination and protecting worker's rights to family leave do prohibit differential treatment of male and female workers based on perceived or actual family responsibilities (EEOC, 2007). Currently, only two states specifically prohibit workplace discrimination based on family status/responsibilities.</p> | | | |
| Hillary Clinton | Barack Obama | John Edwards | Notes: |
| Will "work to prohibit" workplace discrimination against parents. | Commit the government to enforcing recently-enacted EEOC guidelines on caregiver discrimination. | No statement on FRD in "Balancing Work & Family Plan." | |

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| Child Care & Afterschool Care: | | | |
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| Current Provisions: | | | |
| <p>Child care costs, regulations and quality assurances vary widely across all 50 states. In every region of the United States, child care fees for an infant are higher than the average amount that families spend on food; in 43 states, the price of full-time center-based infant care is higher than tuition at a public college (NACCRRRA, 2007). Low-income parents and TANF recipients are eligible for child care subsidies through state and federal programs, but only a fraction of working parents who are eligible for subsidies receive them. Middle- and higher-income families benefit from the Dependent Care Tax Credit, which provides a tax credit for up to 35 percent of first \$3,000 of child care expenditures for one child (or up to \$6,000 for two). The federal Child Care Development Block Grant provides funds for improving the quality of the child care workforce through training and wage supplements and for the expansion of regulated child care facilities.</p> | | | |
| Hillary Clinton | Barack Obama | John Edwards | Notes: |
| <p>Address "current shortcomings" of the Dependent Care Tax Credit (no details specified);</p> <p>Increase funding through the Child Care Development Block Grant to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) help states improve and enforce licensing and safety standards; 2) support public-private innovation to increase access to affordable, high-quality child care; 3) promote state-wide rating systems for parents seeking quality care; 4) improve training for child care workforce; Provide At Home Infant Care subsidies to qualified, low-income parents who want to stay at home rather than place an infant in child care. | <p>Revise Dependent Care Tax Credit so that it is refundable and allows low-income families to receive up to a 50 percent credit for child care costs;</p> <p>Double federal funding for high-quality afterschool programs, including measures to maximize quality and performance of federally-funded afterschool programs nationwide.</p> | <p>Revise Dependent Care Tax Credit to make credit partially refundable to low-income families and provide a 50 percent credit for child care expenses up to \$5,000;</p> <p>Expand the DCTC to help at-home parents pay for newborn care;</p> <p>Support states in implementing child care quality improvement programs, similar to North Carolina's Smart Start initiative, "which improves child care quality with certification and teacher training that leads to higher pay, reduced turnover and better outcomes for children."</p> | <p>The candidates' proposals focus on expanding and refining existing funding and tax credit systems which have only modestly improved the availability and affordability of quality care for most working families.</p> |

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| Universal Preschool: | | | |
| Current Provisions: As the result of recent studies finding that providing high-quality preschool for at-risk three- and four-year olds is extremely cost effective as a long-term social investment, proposals for funding universal preschool have gained momentum in a number of states. Nationwide, preschool enrollment varies by family income, with children in families with incomes above \$50,000/year more likely to attend preschool than those in lower income families. Although programs such as Head Start are designed to improve the social and educational outcomes of very low-income and at-risk children, current programs fail to enroll even half of all three- and four-year olds in eligible families. | | | |
| Hillary Clinton | Barack Obama | John Edwards | Notes: |
| Invest \$10 billion in universal access to high-quality preschool for all four-year-olds through a federal-state partnership. | Launch Children's First Agenda to provide "care, learning and support" to families with children ages zero to five; Increase funding for Head Start; Create Early Learning Grants to help states create a system of high-quality early care and education for all young children. | Make quality preschool universally available for four-year olds, free to low-income families with sliding-scale tuition for higher income families. | In the states, there has been considerable debate about funding universal public preschool or pre-kindergarten for all children, versus funding universal access for low-income children and leaving higher income families to depend on market options as they do now. The argument centers on research finding that children in low-income and at-risk families benefit more from quality preschool and pre-k programs than children in higher-income families do. However, some early education experts believe that children with special needs or barriers to social inclusion benefit from participation in classrooms with students of mixed abilities and family characteristics. |

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| Promoting Workplace Flexibility: | | | |
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| Current Provisions: | | | |
| <p>Compared to employment standards in other economically advanced countries, U.S. labor regulations are more employer-friendly than family-friendly, giving individual workers little or no control over work schedules or compulsory overtime hours. Professionals and managers are more likely to have working time flexibility than lower level workers and, overall, male employees are more likely to have job flexibility than female employees. According to a recent study, two-thirds of first-time mothers reported that they did not have enough job flexibility to meet their personal needs and caregiving responsibilities.</p> | | | |
| Hillary Clinton | Barack Obama | John Edwards | Notes: |
| <p>Create a model workplace award through the Department of Labor to highlight businesses that establish innovative workplace flexibility programs and provide grants to "these and other businesses to expand their models to serve more employees;"</p> <p>Require all federal agencies to set specific telecommuting goals for their workforces;</p> <p>Invest up to \$50 million dollars annually in state-level telecommuting initiatives.</p> | <p>Create a program to inform business about the benefits of flexible work schedules for productivity and creating a positive work environment;</p> <p>Help businesses create flexible work opportunities and increase federal incentives for telecommuting;</p> <p>Implement a right to request flexible and reduced work hour for all federal employees.</p> | <p>Although Edwards acknowledges lack of job flexibility as a problem for working families, his plan offers no specific proposal for increasing workplace flexibility.</p> | <p>While telecommuting is a popular proposal for increasing workplace flexibility, promoting telecommuting options only benefits workers whose jobs are not location-specific and excludes many occupations with high concentrations of women workers, such as nurses and health care aides, child care workers, school teachers, retail workers, restaurant and food service workers, housekeeping and janitorial service workers, and many other manufacturing, trade, and service workers. Furthermore, the goal of making federal agencies model employers is likely to have a limited impact on employment practices in the private sector.</p> |

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| Additional Provisions: | | | |
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| Hillary Clinton | Barack Obama | John Edwards | Notes: |
| Achieve work family balance goals consistent with fiscal discipline. Clinton proposes to pay for the new programs by closing a loophole in tax shelter laws. | Obama's work-life balance platform is part of a broader agenda to "Reclaim the American Dream," which includes new tax credits for middle-class working families, automatically enrolling workers in portable retirement savings accounts, reforming bankruptcy laws, protecting families from predatory lending practices, lowering health care costs for working families, and making college education more affordable through a refundable tax credit. | Assure economic fairness for independent workers by requiring employers to offer universal, portable retirement accounts, with matching funds from the federal government (up to \$500/year) to encourage savings; modernize unemployment insurance to cover more non-standard workers. | All three candidates have announced plans for Universal Health Care Coverage. |

For more information:

Hillary Clinton: Helping Parents Balance Work & Family

<http://www.hillaryclinton.com/news/release/view/?id=3743>

Barack Obama's Plan to Reclaim the American Dream: Work-Family Balance

<http://my.barackobama.com/page/-/HQpress/110707%20FINAL%20national%20fact%20sheet%20American%20Dream.pdf>

John Edwards Announces Bold Plan for Paid Family and Medical Leave

<http://www.johnedwards.com/issues/working-families/20071113-paid-leave/>