PS1 for 2-19-87#PARENTAL vs. MATERNITY LEAVE

The proposed Parental Leave bill doesn't have anything to do with maternity or with the disability connected with childbirth. We already have a Pregnancy Anti-Discrimination Law. Two-thirds of U.S. companies grant maternity leave and, in most companies, maternity medical costs are included in the health and medical benefits plan.

The proposed Parental Leave bill is a proposal to force employers to skew their employees' benefit package in favor of one narrow group of workers at the expense of others. The proposed bill is highly discriminatory in favor of high-paid, two-earner yuppie couples who, as a practical matter, would be the only ones able to benefit.

The proposed bill is highly discriminatory against every other type of employee: the men whose wives are fulltime homemakers and mothers, the single parents and all low-income workers who could not afford to take off unpaid time, women over child-bearing age, all singles, self-employed persons, women who work at home, and all temporary workers including the one who replaces the one who receives the parental leave.

The proposed bill is highly discriminatory in the burden it imposes on some employers at the expense of others. Its costly mandate would fall more heavily on businesses which employ a majority of women since, as a practical matter, more women would get the benefit.

The proposed bill would discriminate against small businesses because the costs and loss of productivity that result from training and substituting a temporary worker are more costly when a small business has only one person in a given job category rather than a pool of workers who can be transferred.

Other costs of the bill include carrying double health and medical benefits during the period of the leave, for both the employee on leave and the temporary worker who takes her place, and the cost of the unemployment insurance for the temporary worker who will be dismissed when the employee on leave returns to work.

The 13 million new jobs in the private sector in the last five years have been created by small businesses. Yet many small companies are struggling at the margin to stay in business and to meet foreign competition. Any newly-mandated cost will have to come at the expense of something else.

The proposed bill is a foolish approach to the problem of job security. In today's world, competitiveness is the name of the game, and a business that is not competitive simply cannot provide jobs for anyone. The most important job benefit anyone can have is a job that pays a wage.

The advocates of the proposed Parental Leave bill try to shame us by saying that other countries in the world have mandated parental leave. That's right, many other countries have made the mistake of mandating costly benefits, and they have mandated their citizens right out of jobs. Europe has had a net loss of a million jobs in the last couple of years, and unemployment is much higher than in the United States.

The proposed Parental Leave bill would be the wrong way to go even if it didn't cost anything. The whole trend of employee benefits in the country today is toward a ""cafeteria'' system of benefits.

Since employee benefits add an additional 33 to 40 percent of ""goodies'' over and above wages, it makes a real difference to workers which benefits they get. People's lifestyles and needs differ. The cafeteria approach allows each employee to choose the benefits that best suit his or her needs. To mandate a particular benefit desired by only one small group is unfair to others.

There isn't even any evidence that the unpaid parental leave mandated in this bill is the specific benefit that every working mother would choose. Mothers of small children might prefer other benefits, such as a more inclusive health and medical plan, a pension plan, more paid vacation or holidays, a work day that is one hour shorter, a four-day work week, flexible time schedule, job sharing, or child-care facilities or vouchers.

The tremendous array of other employee benefits in the American economy has grown up voluntarily, either from employers' decisions or collective bargaining.

These include paid holidays and vacations, health and medical plans, and pension plans. There is no evidence that the job benefits available today in America would be as high as they are if government had straitjacketed business by mandating the benefits chosen by the posturing politicians.

The advocates of the Parental Leave bill complain that we have no national child care policy. On the contrary, we do. Our successful policy is to let employers and employees work out their own solutions. That's the system that works the best and fairest for all.