PS for 5/16/91

Does One Size Fit All?

One of the characters in ancient Greek mythology, Procrustes, invented the “one size fits all” mentality. He captured travelers and put them on an iron bed. If their legs were too long, he amputated them to fit; if they were too short, he would stretch them out.

Procrustes would have liked the Federally Mandated Family Leave now being considered by Congress. It is an authentic “one size fits all” approach. It pretends to be pro-family by mandating that employers give all employees a guaranteed return to their jobs after a l2-week leave of absence, but dozens of family situations and work requirements simply do not fit this model.

This legislation is designed to get an employee back into the workforce as soon as possible after a baby is born. That is not what most families want. Why should Congress mandate a benefit to help the woman who wants to return to work after 12 weeks, but totally ignore the woman who wants to stay with her newborn for six months, or a year, or five years, or have a couple of children close together and then return to her job?

There isn’t any evidence that unpaid family leave is the specific benefit that most employed mothers would choose. Employed mothers of small-children usually prefer other benefits, such as higher pay, a shorter work day, a four-day work week, flexible time schedules, part-time work, job sharing, child care vouchers, a better health and medical plan, a pension plan, more paid vacation, more holidays, or the option to pursue employment at home.

A survey by Gallup and Employee Benefit Research Institute showed that, when employees ranked benefits, only 1 percent said that family leave was the most important; 99 percent picked other benefits, none of which was mandated.

Federally Mandated Family Leave is an idea whose time is past, if indeed it ever had a time. Societal changes, Americans’ expectations, and technological innovation have all made Federally Mandated Family Leave an outdated notion that cannot serve the demands of the present or the future.

Many observers believe that our economic future is in direct sales and multi-level marketing. People want their own businesses run out of their own homes. Many

mothers are choosing different options such as fulltime homemakers, or sequential or mommy track careers.

The United States has always had an effective national pro-family policy on parental leave based on freedom from government regulation and freedom of contract. We let employers and workers settle the issue, and the less interference with the bargaining process the more prosperous our economy.

Our private enterprise system has made America the most prosperous nation in the world, where the average couple can aspire to own a home and send their children to college. In countries that order businesses what to pay in wages and benefits, workers simply don't earn enough money to do those things.

The tremendous array of employee benefits which workers receive 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 avai-lab1e in America would be as high as they are today if government had straitjacketed business by mandating the benefits chosen by the posturing politicians. Most big companies with generous benefits started small with no benefits.

The proposed federal Family and Medical Leave bill is not a maternity bill at all; it has nothing to do with the disability that a woman incurs when she is pregnant or gives birth. Maternity benefits for most employed women are already mandated by federal and state laws and are not currently controversial.

The proposed Federally Mandated Family Leave bill is not a plan to expand the benefits "pie" but just to rearrange the pieces on the plate. Its principal beneficiaries would be the highly-paid, two-earner yuppie couples who can easily afford to have one spouse take several 'months off without pay, while the bill is highly discriminatory against the great majority of employees who could never take a l2-week unpaid leave of absence from work or would prefer other benefits.

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

There is nothing pro-family about making it harder for companies to stay in business, be productive, and offer good jobs. There is nothing progressive about requiring single-income families to subsidize a benefit that only upper-income two-income households would enjoy.