

PAGINA BILINGÜE

email

| zip

GO

October 16, 2007

AGENDA FOR WORKING FAMILIES: Helping Parents Balance Work & Family

I want to thank the YWCA for opening their doors to us today, I'm a big supporter of the Y. And I've worked with the YWCA for many years on issues having to do with women and girls. And the crisis services and support that is provided and particularly the tools that the Y helps parents acquire to raise strong healthy children, and provide what I see as the village. They are part of village. It takes a village to raise a child. And the Y has been an absolutely essential part of that village here in Manchester and beyond.

I want to thank Monica Zoloff, the director of the Y, and her staff. I want to thank my old friend Senator Betsey DeVries who has been a strong supporter of the Y and the work that it does in the community. I also want to recognize Tom Donovan the Democratic nominee for the Mayor of Manchester. [inaudible] I look forward to working with you and a lot of people are very excited about your campaign.

You know, Marcy's story is all too familiar: You know you have to take an unpaid leave of absence when you're pregnant. You have to take vacation days to care for your sick children. You're stretched to the breaking point by the cost of raising two kids on your own. You know, raising a family in today's world is hard under any circumstances. I actually think that it's harder today than when I was a young parent. There's just so much going on and the cost of everything's going up. And all of the incoming influences over your children you really have no control over. And doing it by yourself makes it more than doubly hard.

And so everywhere I go I see the anxiety and the frustration of families trying to strike a balance between their obligations at home and those at work. You know, from the parents of young children who are caught at the office or the work place long into the night. To the adult children who are both caring for aging parents and raising their own children. To the young women who often come up to me after I finish speaking and ask how I balance a family and work.

Now I've been fortunate to have so much support as a working mother, but I understand what it means to be pulled in a million directions at once. The panic of having to get up early to get to an appointment when your child has a fever of 102 and the child care center is closed or the babysitter is sick. I remember one time I had to be in court when I was a young lawyer, Chelsea was a baby, we had a woman who did come in and help me she' come in early then after that she'd go home. Chelsea was sick and the babysitter wasn't there and then she called and she was sick too. And it was just that gut-wrenching feeling and I was lucky enough to have a friend who could come over and watch Chelsea while I ran to court then ran back home. But I know that happens every day. And there's so many pressures on young parents. Or the little mental bell that goes off in your head at the exact moment school lets out and you reflexively reach for the phone to check in and make sure your child has made it home safely.

And if you have fewer resources, greater challenges, or an unsympathetic employer, then the struggle to balance family and work can simply be overwhelming. Too many Americans today feel trapped between being there for their kids and being a good

there for their employer.

And our government's policies have just not kept up with the new realities of American life. The traditional family -- the way I was raised- with one breadwinner and one homemaker -- is now the exception rather than the rule. Today, 70 percent of families with children are headed by two working parents or by an unmarried working parent.

And the economy is changing as well. Over the past six years, Americans are actually working harder than ever before. And if you look at the surveys, Americans work harder than anybody else in the world. And yet family incomes have dropped by nearly \$1,000. For all that hard work it's not paying off in material terms to help buy a little more faith and maybe a little more help in dealing with these obligations. At the same time, health care premiums have nearly doubled, college costs are up 40%, and gas prices have more than doubled.

Highly skilled workers are working more hours than ever, and lower-skilled workers often need to take an extra job just to get by. As a result, American parents have twenty-two fewer hours a week to spend with their kids than they did back in 1969. And 67, two-thirds percent, two-thirds of all of working parents say they do not have enough time with their children.

Now, the Family and Medical Leave Act has been a significant step forward in the struggle to balance work and family. 50 million Americans have benefitted from this Act, which guarantees 12 weeks of unpaid leave for the birth of a child, to care for a sick relative, or to tend to a personal medical problem.

However, Family and Leave only covers those who work for businesses with 50 employees or more, and the leave is unpaid. Now, I've had countless people come up to thank me and thank my husband for Family and Medical Leave but a lot of people don't know about it or can't afford to take it. So it's been a tremendous help, but it leaves so many Americans out. But too few of those who are eligible, even for unpaid leave, can take advantage of it. I'm particularly worried about those critical days and weeks that really are important for bonding between new parents and their own children when they're forced to go back to work. Three out of four workers who report that they needed leave, but didn't take it, cited lost wages as the principal reason.

You know, the sad fact is that our country is only one of a handful of countries that don't guarantee a legal right to paid maternity leave. And in the US only 7 percent of men have access to paid paternity leave, and less than 20 percent of women with a high school degree receive paid maternity leave. Now, for professional women, the story is somewhat better. Access to paid leave has steadily risen -- from 14 percent in the 1960s to 63 percent in the 1990s. I remember when I was pregnant I was working as a lawyer. The firm had never had a pregnant lawyer. And I just kept ignoring I was pregnant and the lawyers just kept sort of walking down the hall looking away and nobody would talk about it because I didn't know what I was supposed to say and they certainly didn't know what they were supposed to say. And so Chelsea came early and I was actually ending a trial and thinking "Gosh now I'll have three weeks, maybe a month to get ready." And she must have had a different time table. So the morning after she was born I'm in the hospital and one of the partners in the law firm calls me up and says "Well, I heard you had a baby." And I said "Yeah that's what usually happens when you're pregnant." And he said "well; want me to pick you up on the way to work?" I took that as a joke. I said, "well no," And he said, "what are you going to do?" I said, "no no no, let me think about this."

So you know, I was able to take time off, and I relished that time. I don't know what I would have done without it. Because as I once told Chelsea late one night, she was crying inconsolably, I said, "Chelsea you've never done a baby before, I'm never done a mother before, we're just going to have to work to figure this out." And we had the time to do that, but a lot of young mothers don't. And I think that's bad for them, I think it's bad for their babies, and I think that's bad for all of us. Because you don't get that good beginning that really the foundation to so much more that is going to lead to success.

So I think we've got to take a hard look, not only though at what happens with trying

email

zip

GO

to care for children, but now increasingly for aging parents. You know, we have nearly half of our workers who work in the private sector, 57 million workers altogether in our country who have no sick days at all.

email

zip

GO

And that means that it's really hard when you're responsible for an aging parent who has to get to the doctor. When there may be a parent who may live far from where you're living now, and you need time to go to make sure that he or she is okay. We have a lot of figures that show how much productivity we're losing in the economy because we're not figuring out a way to help family members do what we want them to do, which is care for each other. A flexible schedule would give caregivers an enormous amount of help. I think we should look for ways to do that.

And certainly a lot of women who are employed with children, more than 60% would prefer to work part time, but that's not in the cards, because it's hard to manage that and it often doesn't pay enough to make it work for them. So I think that part of what we have to do is get real about what's happening with families today.

I want to make it easier for people both to work and to fulfill their most important responsibilities. It's as though a lot of people in our society just feel like they're struggling all by themselves, and I think it's time we brought this conversation out into the open.

You know, if you're a worker who gets sick but doesn't have sick days, well you are invisible. And if you're a single mom who can't afford childcare then you're invisible too. And if you're a parent who can't take time off to take your child to the doctor or to care for your aging parents, well, then you're invisible.

And if you're a new mom, that wants to spend those critical early weeks bonding with their child, whether it's your birth child or an adopted child, and your fortunes turn to work, well you feel pretty invisible as well.

Middle class Americans may be invisible to George Bush. But they're not going to be invisible to me. And when we take back the white house they will no longer be invisible to the President of the United States. It's time for a new administration that actually cares about the middle class. It's time for change of course in this country. We have to change our economic course, we have to change our course in Iraq, and change course when it comes to health care.

The Bush economy has been a trap door economy. Too many families are just one diagnosis, one pink slip, one missed mortgage payment away from falling through. It's time once again to say, that America is only as strong as its middle class.

And one of the keys to strengthening the middle class is supporting middle class families. That's why I've been so passionate about reauthorizing the Children's health insurance program that I helped to create.

And that's why I've been so outraged over the Republican attack on this. And let me tell you one story that made me really angry. The story about a 12 year old boy named Graeme Frost, he was in a terrible car accident, but thanks goodness he was covered by the Children's health insurance program. And recently Graham and his family came to congress, to ask us to cover more children. But the President doesn't want to do that, so the Republican attack machine went after Graham, a 12 year old boy. Well they can come after me any time, but shame on them for attacking a child. And shame on them for opposing health care for our children.

I think we've had enough of this cruel and destructive politics in America. And as President I'm going to return our focus to supporting middle class and hard working families, especially when it comes to caring for children, an issue that I've worked on my entire life. During law school I focused on how the law affects kids. After I graduated I turned down law firms to go door to door for the Children's defense fund, trying to figure out why so many children weren't enrolled at school. That led to the landmark federal special education law.

During my years in Arkansas, I founded a group called Arkansas advocates for children and family and developed a scholarship program to support single moms. When Bill was elected President, I worked very hard to support the family medical

leave act and would proud it was the first bill that he signed into law. It's been such a success that it's hard to remember how controversial it once was, it was actually vetoed twice before my husband was elected. And I want to pay special tribute to my colleague and friend Senator Chris Dodd who was the champion of the family medical leave act for all of those years.

I also worked to create early Head Start, to ensure investment in Head Start and childcare funding, and I planned and to carried out the historic white house conferences on early childhood development and childcare.

I continued this work in the Senate. [inaudible] legislation I offered to provide respite care for family caregivers, a bill to give families more flexibility in finding child care, and grandparents more help in raising their grandchildren. I co-sponsored legislation to provide seven paid sick days a year to help parents care for sick parents or children. And I've worked with FLAN the Family medical leave act, and to extend it for up to 6 months for family caring for wounded soldiers.

But as far as we've come, it's clear that we have a long way to go. I'll never forget a newspaper advice column I read in the early 1980's, I was working at a law firm and my daughter was about 3 years old, someone had written this advice column, and they asked I'm about to get a big promotion and I'm going to have my own office. What kind of decorations are appropriate for my office? Well the advice columnist responded that he needed to know if the writer was a man or a woman because it would affect his answer. If you're a man, he wrote, and you have a family, put up lots of pictures of your family because people will think to themselves this is a stable person with good family values. But if you're a woman, don't put out any pictures of your family in the office, because people will think you can't keep your mind on the job. Well of course I immediately filled my little office with family pictures. Because I thought that that would [inaudible]

Now, that was a long time ago, but it still sums up the attitude of America's policies toward women and parents in the workplace: Keep your family life to yourself and don't let your family affect your work. Well, I think we've had enough of that. It's about time we stopped just talking about family values and started pursuing policies that truly value families. So today, I'm handing out my agenda that I hope will make a difference in helping young families particularly strike that balance between family and work.

For me this is a very personal issue because we all have a stake in the next generation. Sometimes people say to me well if you just focus on families with children. Well that's unfair to everybody else but I couldn't disagree more. Today kids are tomorrow's doctors and nurses, teachers, innovators, police officers and firefighters. So many other positions that we desperately need in our society. So a generation of healthy children raised by strong families is in America's best interest. And I think it's integrally related to our nation's future.

The first part of my agenda is to promote paid family leave, which is critical for giving new parents the opportunity to bond with their children at the most important time in their development.

Parental leave rules may give many families time off, but families of modest means too often simply can't afford to take it unless that leave is paid.

I believe we should set a goal of every family in America being able to take time off when their children are born or adopted, and at least some of that time should be paid leave for those who need it. Everyone should be able to take the time to start their children off right. No one should miss out on those critical early days.

Now this is a goal that will take some time to achieve. But what I want to do is propose that we have a Family Leave Initiative with federal government leadership and state level innovation. Many states that considered legislation, for example California now guarantees six weeks of family leave that employees paid at 55% of their wages up to \$882 a week. I will submit \$1 billion per year to an innovation fund that encourages a kind of state level solution. What worked in California may not work in Arkansas may not work in New Hampshire. We'll offer competitive matching

email

zip

grants that covers startup costs and help pay an equal part of the costs. We're not going to dictate from Washington what approach states should take but we will seek out and support the best innovation.

email

zip

GO

I also want to expand the Family and Medical Leave Act. It currently only covers firms of fifty or more workers, it has not been an imposition on businesses. All of the nay-saying and the sort of Chicken Little predictions have not come true. I want to lower the threshold to twenty-five workers that will include an additional 13 million Americans. I also will reinstate a regulation I fought for during my husband's administration. Select states use their unemployment insurance system to provide paid paternity and maternity leave. President Bush was wrong to overturn it and we will bring it back.

I also want to make the federal government a model workplace by providing paid parental leave. For a relatively modest cost, we can provide that for all federal employees. Doing so would set a standard and would make government service more attractive for younger workers. Parents also need access to leave at times other than the birth or adoption of a child and we need to recognize that reality. I will also work to promote flexible work scheduling. And guarantee the rights of parents and other caregivers who request a flexible schedule without adverse consequences. Now this initiative simply requires employers to consider flexibility seriously. It is not a mandate. All employers can grant such requests. The goal is to shift from a presumption of no flexibility to a presumption of some flexibility with a cooperative approach. United Seasons passed a similar law in 2003 which produced a promising result. It was done without a major imposition to business or destruction to the workplace. I believe that we could encourage people to start having these conversations in the workplace. Because I think it's important that we look for ways to be more flexible.

Second I will promote model workplaces in corporate America and reward employers who help their employees balance work and family. We'll establish a public-private partnership program on model workplaces at the Department of Labor and establish awards to highlight businesses that establish such innovative workplace flexibility programs. The partnership will provide grants to businesses to expand models to serve more employees and work to spread the word. We'll also promote the most innovative workplace approaches in areas such as telecommuting. You know reduced work schedules, flexible arrival and departure time, offering on-site services such as child care, providing predictable work schedules, offering a cafeteria of many new benefits that different families can choose for themselves. I want to offer telecommuting because it will not only give more flexibility but it will also reduce rush-hour hardships, improve the environment, and lower our emissions. This has been one of the principal recommendations, to try to get cars off the road particularly at choke-point times.

Third I will work to ensure better access to high quality child care and to help parents who want to stay at home with their children. I will increase funding to the child care development block grant to get back to providing funding that has been dramatically cut back during the Bush administration. We have to improve the quality of child care by helping states improve and enforce licensing and safety standards and there's a lot we can do to get more flexibility in child care. I particularly want to allow eligible stay-at-home parents to receive child care subsidies through the child care development block grant. Currently only parents who place their children in child care are eligible to receive that assistance. That makes no sense to me.

Why should we pay for other people to care for your children but not give you the support to stay home and do it yourself? By including stay at home parents, we can give families more options and more time together. We'll also begin to find a way therefore to give parents the choice to stay home instead of rushing back to work. And finally, I'll work to protect workers against pregnancy discrimination. I thought we had put this to rest 30 years ago, but unfortunately we had not. No woman should be fired for being pregnant or giving birth. And no dad should be fired for taking a few days off to help his wife recover from childbirth. Or care for their newborn or adopted baby. But today women can be fired just for being pregnant if an employer has a no-leave policy. If that sounds horribly outdated, that's because it is. It's time to bring

our laws against pregnancy discrimination into this century. That means banning it from our workplaces, which is exactly what I will do as president. Now I assume I will have one hundred percent support from the Republicans who care deeply about supporting pregnant women and their families and I look forward to having that [inaudible]

Now will all of this be easy? Of course not. But Americans who are working hard and taking responsibility deserve the chance to do right for their children and their parents. And this is not expensive. This is totally affordable, everything I propose in this campaign I tell you how I will pay for it. Because we're going to get back to fiscal responsibility. But I think we also have to get back to family responsibility [inaudible]

You know, when I was a young mother, I was so grateful for the help that I had. You know, my parents would come and stay with us for a couple of weeks at a time or Bill who was then Governor of Arkansas and needed to take a trip. And I wanted to go and they'd come and take care of our daughter. And we had this network of friends and family that was always there for us. In addition to doing what I want to do as president which includes policies that I've outlined, I really want to speak out about how we've got to support young families more in our community. We need to be there for a lot of these young moms like Marcy, who are working as hard as they can. And look for ways within our neighborhood or our communities, using institutions like the Y to really make a difference. It's not just what our government does, in fact that is probably the least of it. It's how we feel for helping those who are doing the most important job in our society, raising the next generation. So I think we'll have some ideas that people can you know look to take for themselves, such as volunteering at a childcare center, looking for more intergenerational programs. We have found great support of daycare for the elderly mixed with daycare for children. We need to look to see how we support institutions like the Y that we all of the nonprofit support that they can get to do these important work that they do every single day. So if we're concerned and I think we should be. That we are putting so much stress on young families. And I believe we're seeing some of that come out in some of the behaviors of our young children. Then we each have a stake in trying to be there be part of that village.

You know when I wrote that book back in 1995 and 96, and said it takes a village to raise a child, some people said well that doesn't apply to us. That's an old African proverb. I think it applies to any society. We may be implement it differently. It may not look the same but I think there's more than enough ways we can recognize we're all in this together. I reject the Bush administration's attitude that everyone is on his or her own. I don't think that will be a strong society and I know it is not how we build strong family and support for raising up children. So I'm going to be asking all of us to think of ways we can help to make it just a little easier so that our young parents know that the most important job they have is not going to be undermined by the job they have to do to bring home the income that supports them and their family. Thank you all very much.

Paid for by Hillary Clinton for President

[Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#)