

Work/Family Promises of Obama

The Agenda: Expanding Family Leave, Paid Sick Days, Flexible Work Arrangements

Obamamania continues. This weekend I visited a friend at his parents's house. Charming, loving, and completely normal under most circumstances, his parents had erected an Obama-shrine, displaying magazine covers, newspapers, and DNC postcards bearing our new president's handsome mug along the piano.

Does the American public have high expectations of Obama? You betcha. Here at The Lattice Group, we'll be watching, hawk-like, the Administration's every move on work/family issues. The promises are big: "At a time when costs are rising and Americans are working harder just to keep up, President Obama will provide relief for the middle class and support for working people. In addition to his health care and tax relief plans, Obama will make college affordable, reform our bankruptcy and credit card laws, protect the balance between work and family, and put a secure and dignified retirement within the reach of all Americans." (White House website)

YES, please! Of particular interest to moi are the following agenda items:

- Extend Paid Sick Days to All Workers: Half of all private sector workers have no paid sick days and the problem is worse for employees in low-paying jobs, where less than a quarter receive any paid sick days. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will require that employers provide seven paid sick days per year.
- Expand the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA): The FMLA covers only certain people who work for employers with 50 or more employees. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will expand the FMLA to cover businesses with 25 or more employees, and to cover more purposes including allowing: leave for workers who provide elder care; 24 hours of leave each year for parents to participate in their children's academic activities at school; leave for workers who care for individuals who reside in their home for 6 months or more; and leave for employees to address domestic violence and sexual assault.
- Encourage States to Adopt Paid Leave: President Barack Obama will initiate a 50 state strategy to encourage all of the states to adopt paid-leave systems. Obama and Biden will provide a \$1.5 billion fund to assist states with start-up costs and to help states offset the costs for employees and employers.
- Expand High-Quality Afterschool Opportunities: Barack Obama and Joe Biden will double funding for the main federal support for afterschool programs, the 21st Century Learning Centers program, to serve one million more children. They will include measures to maximize performance and effectiveness across grantees nationwide.
- Expand Flexible Work Arrangements: Barack Obama and Joe Biden will address this concern by creating a program to inform businesses about the benefits of flexible work schedules for productivity and establishing positive workplaces; helping businesses create flexible work opportunities; and increasing federal incentives for telecommuting. Obama and Biden will also make the federal government a model employer in terms of adopting flexible work schedules and permitting employees to petition to request flexible arrangements.
- Protect Against Caregiver Discrimination: Workers with family obligations often are discriminated against in the workplace. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will commit the government to enforcing recently-enacted Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines on caregiver discrimination.

This reads like a Lattice Wish List (not to mention the important programs for low-wage and struggling workers, like raising the minimum wage and expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit). At first, I thought, "better not hold my breathe." But then I just repeated "Yes, we can. Yes, we can. Yes, we can" to myself over and over again.

Next thing you know, I'll be cutting out newspaper clippings for my Obama scrapbook and lighting incense around a gold-plated bust of Barack.

- Vetta

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