



RECLAIMING THE AMERICAN DREAM FOR WORKING WOMEN

The American dream is increasingly out of reach for many people, including far too many women and their families. Despite decades of progress, women still make only 77 cents for every dollar a man makes. Women have been experiencing stagnating wages, declining health care coverage, erosion of pension protections, rising personal debt, and have watched jobs disappear as a result of global competition and rising housing costs. As larger percentages of women have entered the workforce, working hours have grown longer and family caregiving obligations have been stretched. Most American workers cannot adjust their work schedules to handle a family emergency without the risk of losing their jobs or take a day off to care for a sick or newborn child without the risk of losing pay or vacation days.

Barack Obama will ensure that our government's policies meet the needs of America's working women. Obama stood up for equal pay for women in the Illinois State Senate and U.S. Senate, and will continue to champion this cause as president – starting with reversing the Supreme Court ruling last year that made it more difficult for women to challenge unequal pay in court. Obama's tax fairness plan will provide a \$500 tax credit to 95 percent of American workers and \$1,000 for working families. Obama will also help families better balance their busy careers with their family needs. He has called for a \$1.5 billion fund to assist state adopt paid leave programs and supports legislation that would provide seven paid sick days to American workers every year. And to help parents address their childcare needs, Obama has proposed doubling federal funding for quality afterschool programs and expanding the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit so that families can receive greater benefits.

As a recent report found, John McCain's "policy platform is clearly at odds with the needs and hopes of many American women."¹ Earlier this year, McCain skipped an important vote on this issue, and stated that he opposed legislation to reverse the Supreme Court decision that made it difficult for women who received unequal pay to file Title VII civil rights suits in federal court.² McCain has not offered any policies to expand paid leave and sick leave for working Americans. Nor has he offered any proposals to help parents juggle work and family, such as making high-quality childcare more affordable. And rather than providing immediate tax relief for middle-class working families, John McCain has offered a regressive tax policy that mostly benefits the wealthiest Americans and corporations.

THE OBAMA PLAN TO SUPPORT WORKING WOMEN AND FAMILIES

Fight for Pay Equity: Throughout his career, Barack Obama has championed the right of women to receive equal pay for equal work. In the Illinois State Senate, Obama cosponsored and voted for the Illinois Equal Pay Act, which provided 330,000 more women protection from pay discrimination. In the U.S. Senate, Obama joined a bipartisan group of Senators to introduce the Fair Pay Restoration Act, a bill to overturn the Supreme Court's recent 5-4 decision in *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company*. The bill would restore the clear intent of Congress that workers must have a reasonable time to file a pay discrimination claim after they

¹ http://thinkprogress.org/wonkroom/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/womens_paper.pdf

² [AP, 4/24/08]

become victims of discriminatory compensation. Obama is also a cosponsor of Senator Tom Harkin's (D-IA) Fair Pay Act. As president, Obama will continue to promote paycheck equity and close the wage gap between men and women.

Expand High-Quality Afterschool Opportunities: Barack Obama will double funding for the main federal support for afterschool programs, the 21st Century Learning Centers program, to serve one million more children. Obama will include measures to maximize performance and effectiveness across grantees nationwide.

Expand the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit: The Child and Development Care Tax Credit provides too little relief to families that struggle to afford child care expenses. Currently the credit only covers up to 35 percent of the first \$3,000 of child care expenses a family incurs for one child and the first \$6,000 for a family with two or more children. And the credit is not refundable, which means that upper-income families disproportionately benefit while families who make under \$50,000 a year receive less than a third of the tax credit. Barack Obama will reform the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit by making it refundable and allowing low-income families to receive up to a 50 percent credit for their child care expenses.

Expand the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA): The FMLA covers only certain employees of employers with 50 or more employees. As a result, only about half of American workers are eligible for leave under the FMLA. Barack Obama will expand the FMLA to cover businesses with 25 or more employees. Obama will expand the FMLA to cover more purposes as well, including: to care for elderly parents; to participate in children's school-related activities; and to address domestic violence and sexual assault.

Encourage States to Adopt Paid Leave: According to the National Partnership for Women and Families, 78 percent of employees covered by the FMLA who have needed leave but have not taken it report that it is because they could not afford to take unpaid leave. Of those employees who could not afford leave, nearly 88 percent report that they would have taken leave if they had been able to receive some pay while away from work. Barack Obama will initiate a 50 state strategy to encourage all of the states to adopt paid-leave systems. Obama 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. Obama's Department of Labor will also provide technical information to the states on how to craft paid-leave programs consistent with their local needs.

Paid Sick Days: 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. Forty percent of women do not have a single paid sick day. Barack Obama will require that employers provide seven paid sick days per year.

Protect Against Caregiver Discrimination: Workers with family obligations often are discriminated against in the workplace. This is a growing problem, as evidenced by the skyrocketing number of discrimination suits being filed: there has been a 400 percent increase in the number of family responsibility discrimination lawsuits in the last decade. Barack Obama will prevent parents from being discriminated against because of caregiving responsibilities. Obama will commit the government to enforcing recently-enacted Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines on caregiver discrimination.

Expand Flexible Work Arrangements: Working parents often have to juggle not only child care responsibilities, but also care responsibilities for elderly relatives. Barack Obama 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 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. This program has achieved great success in Great Britain, and Obama will replicate it throughout the federal government.