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NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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FAMILY LEAVE

COMPROMISE FALLS SHORT; BUSINESSES AND WORKERS WANT CHOICE, NOT MANDATES

THE LONG AWAITED AND MUCH HERALDED COMPROMISE ON FAMILY LEAVE FALLS FAR SHORT OF ITS EXPECTATIONS.

GRANTED THEY HAVE DEALT WITH SOME OF THE PERIPHERAL CONCERNS, FOR EXAMPLE, THEY CLAIM TO HAVE STREAMLINED THE ELABORATE AND COMPLEX PROCEDURES FOR INVESTIGATING ALLEGATIONS THAT AN EMPLOYER HAS IMPROPERLY DEFINED FAMILY OR MEDICAL LEAVE TO A WORKER. BUT, THEY HAVE NOT ADDRESSED THE CRITICAL ISSUE, THE MANDATE.

GREAT NAME, BAD LAW

WHO CAN BE AGAINST A BILL WHICH DEALS WITH FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ISSUES? IN SHORT, WHO COULD POSSIBLY BE AGAINST SUCH IMPORTANT FAMILY ISSUES AS LEAVE TO HAVE A CHILD OR LEAVE TO CARE FOR AN ILL FAMILY MEMBER?

WELL, FRANKLY CONTRARY TO WHAT THE PROponents OF THIS LEGISLATION WOULD HAVE YOU BELIEVE -- NO ONE IS OPPOSED TO THE UNDERLYING GOALS OF THE LEGISLATION, AND THAT INCLUDES THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, MYSELF, AND MY OTHER COLLEAGUES ON THIS SIDE OF THE AISLE.

IN A PERFECT WORLD WE WOULD LIKE EVERYONE TO HAVE EVERY BENEFIT THEY NEED, WHEN THEY NEED IT.

INDEED, I WISH THE ISSUE WERE AS SIMPLE AS WHETHER YOU ARE PRO-FAMILY OR ANTI-FAMILY FOR WE COULD ALL VOTE PRO-FAMILY AND GO HOME. BUT THAT IS NOT THE ISSUE -- THE ISSUE IS WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT KNOWS BEST ABOUT HOW TO SPEND YOUR MONEY.

MANDATES HARM EMPLOYEES

THE TRUTH IS THIS BILL IS A MANDATE ON VIRTUALLY EVERY BUSINESS AND EVERY BUSINESS'S EMPLOYEES WHERE THERE ARE 50 OR MORE WORKERS.

IT SEEMS STRANGE TO ME, THAT WHEN WE LIVE IN AN ERA OF "INDIVIDUAL CHOICE" -- OF INDIVIDUAL PREFERENCE AND SELECTION -- THAT MANY MEMBERS ARE PUSHING A BILL THAT PRESCRIBES A "ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL" APPROACH TO PUBLIC POLICY.

INDEED, THE LEGISLATION IS LITERALLY THE "ANTITHESIS" OF FREE CHOICE.

WHETHER YOU ARE SINGLE OR MARRIED,
WHETHER YOU HAVE CHILDREN OR DON'T HAVE CHILDREN,
WHETHER YOUR CHILDREN ARE TODDLERS OR COLLEGE GRADUATES,
WHETHER YOUR FAMILY IS HEALTHY OR SICK,

(MORE)

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WHETHER YOUR PARENTS ARE DEAD OR ALIVE -- IN SHORT, IRRESPECTIVE OF YOUR OWN PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES, YOUR EMPLOYER IS REQUIRED TO OFFER THIS FRINGE BENEFIT WHICH IN THE REAL WORLD MEANS YOU GET LESS OF SOMETHING ELSE.

IT DOESN'T TAKE A BRAIN SURGEON TO FIGURE OUT THAT ONE'S PRIORITIES AND NEEDS CHANGE AS YOU PASS THROUGH DIFFERENT PHASES OF LIFE.

I'VE TALKED TO SOME YOUNGER WORKERS IN MY STATE WHO AREN'T MARRIED AND HAVE NO DEPENDENTS AND THE LAST FRINGE BENEFIT THEY ARE INTERESTED IN IS THIS LEGISLATION.

INDEED, YOU ASK THEM IF THEY WOULD RATHER HAVE THIS LEGISLATION -- WHICH PROVIDES THEM WITH NOTHING -- OR HAVE THE MONEY THAT THIS BILL COSTS GO TOWARDS AN EXTRA DAY OR TWO OF VACATION LEAVE OR THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN ON-SITE HEALTH CLUB OR DENTAL BENEFITS -- AND THEIR ANSWER IS LET US DECIDE FOR OURSELVES. AND, IN FACT, THAT IS HAPPENING. COMPANIES ARE BEGINNING TO INCLUDE THESE BENEFITS AS A RESULT OF INTERNAL DISCUSSION AND NEGOTIATION.

IN SHORT, DON'T HAVE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OUT THERE TELLING US WE ARE ALL THE SAME AND WANT ALL THE SAME BENEFITS BECAUSE THE WORLD IS NOT AND DOES NOT WORK THAT WAY.

THE SAME RESPONSES COME FROM OLDER WORKERS, TOO. CERTAINLY, OLDER WORKERS HAVE LITTLE INTEREST IN LEAVE TO HAVE A BABY WHEN THEIR CHILDREN ARE ALL GROWN UP. I SUSPECT THAT THESE WORKERS WOULD RATHER HAVE THE MONEY THAT THIS BILL COSTS TO GO TOWARDS A PENSION CONTRIBUTION OR EXTENDED OR EXPANDED HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE.

I SHOULD ADD THAT THIS "CASE-BY-CASE" FEEDBACK THAT I'VE GOTTEN ON THIS LEGISLATION IS BORNE OUT IN PUBLIC SURVEYS.

A GALLUP POLL FOUND THAT ONLY 1 PERCENT OF 1,000 RESPONDENTS LISTED PARENTAL LEAVE AS THEIR MOST VALUABLE EMPLOYEE BENEFIT. AND A JANUARY 1991 PENN & SHOEN SURVEY FOUND THAT 89 PERCENT OF 1,000 RESPONDENTS PREFERRED THAT EMPLOYEE BENEFITS BE DECIDED PRIVATELY BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES RATHER THAN MANDATED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

IMAGINE YOURSELF A BUSINESS MAN OR WOMEN WITH A SMALL COMPANY WITH 50 OR 60 EMPLOYEES. COMPETITION IS TIGHT, PROFITS ARE TIGHT, LABOR IS TIGHT, BUSINESS IS TIGHT, AND COSTS SUCH AS HEALTH INSURANCE ARE RISING FAST.

AND THEN THE U.S. CONGRESS MANDATES PARENTAL LEAVE WHICH IS GOING TO COST YOUR BUSINESS MORE -- MORE IN TERMS OF INSURANCE PREMIUMS, MORE IN TERMS OF LOST PRODUCTIVITY, MORE IN TERMS OF INCREASED TRAINING AND REPLACEMENT COSTS, AND MORE IN TERMS OF ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLIANCE COSTS.

IN THIS CASE, THIS "MORE" WILL MEAN SO MUCH "LESS" FOR EVERYONE. LET'S NOT MAKE THAT MISTAKE.

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