



## BARACK OBAMA'S PLAN TO SUPPORT WORKING FAMILIES

*"We know that the cost of the American dream must never come at the expense of the American family. You're working longer hours. More families have two parents working. Meanwhile, it's hard to get a hand. It's even harder to get a break . . . I'll be a President who stands up for working parents. We'll require employers to provide seven paid sick days each year. We'll enforce laws that prohibit caregiver discrimination. And we'll encourage flexible work schedules to better balance work and parenting for mothers and fathers. That's the change that working families need."*

[Barack Obama, Remarks in Bettendorf, IA, 11/07/07]

### BARACK OBAMA'S WORK-FAMILY BALANCE AGENDA

American workers expect that achieving the American Dream will take hard work. But they do not expect that it will require them to abandon their children and aging parents in times of need. As larger percentages of women have entered the workforce, working hours have grown longer, and workers find themselves caring for their aging and infirm parents, family caregiving has been stressed and stretched. Two-parent families in Iowa work an average of 3,850 hours per year, more than in all but three states. 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. As president, Barack Obama will ensure that our government's policies match the reality of our working lives.

#### **Expand High-Quality Afterschool Opportunities**

Expanding access to high-quality afterschool programs will help children learn and strengthen a broad range of skills and provide relief to working parents who have to juggle child care and work responsibilities. There are more than 300,000 children in Iowa aged 5 to 12 who could benefit from afterschool programs. 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**

Iowans in particular need more help with child care expenses. Although federal rules allow child care assistance up to 85 percent of the median income, Iowa only provides child care assistance to families making up to 43 percent of the median income. As a result, child care assistance is harder to obtain in Iowa than in all but nine other states. And of the more than 56,000 Iowa children under 13 who are eligible, only 32 percent receive assistance. 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. Coupled with Obama's "Making Work Pay" tax credit, this proposal will help put more money directly in the pockets of hardworking low and middle-income parents.

#### **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.

Barack Obama will expand the FMLA to cover more purposes as well. He will:

- Allow workers to take leave for elder care needs.
- Allow parents up to 24 hours of leave each year to participate in their children's academic activities at school. Many states, including California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Vermont, and the District of Columbia, have enacted laws that allow parents to take time off to participate in designated school-related functions.
- Allow leave to be taken for purposes of caring for individuals who reside in the home for 6 months or more.
- Expand FMLA to cover leave for employees to address domestic violence and sexual assault against themselves, their children, or their parents.

### **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. Furthermore, access to paid leave is correlated with income and education, with low-income families least likely to have the resources or savings to compensate for time off. The states have begun to respond. California, for example, has recently initiated paid leave through its disability insurance fund, thereby making sure that the costs aren't borne by employers alone. As president, 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. Obama will prevent parents from being discriminated against because of caregiving responsibilities. Barack Obama will commit the government to enforcing recently-enacted Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines on caregiver discrimination.

### **Expand Flexible Work Arrangements**

Iowa ranks third in the nation in percentage of children under 6 years old for whom both parents are in the workforce. 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.