



Sen. Joni Ernst, Sen. Mike Lee, Sen. Marco Rubio Statements on
**A New, Common Sense Approach to
Increasing Access to Paid Leave**

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OPERATOR: Good morning and welcome to Independent Women's Forum National Press call on a new, common-sense approach to increasing access to paid leave. Today's conference is being recorded.

To open the discussion it's IWF's President, Carrie Lukas. Please go ahead ma'am.

CARRIE LUKAS: Thank you so much for joining me today. IWF was proud to publish the first paper by Kristin Shapiro outlining how we can reform and improve Social Security to increase access to paid leave. We're gratified this idea has gotten so much attention.

And to start this call I'd like to welcome Senator Joni Ernst from Iowa, to make a statement.

SEN. JONI ERNST: Good morning everyone. I want to thank Carrie and Kristin with the Independent Women's Forum for holding this call today to discuss the issue of paid leave, an issue that's important to millions of mothers, fathers and families across the country. And it is long overdue that we get serious about a path forward. Also I'd like to thank my colleague Senator Mike Lee for his great leadership on this topic as well.

As I'm sure many of you on today's call can attest, being a working parent is no easy task. Throughout my career I've worked with many new parents who struggle to afford day care but also needed to continue working. As a nation we can do better for our families.

President Trump highlighted paid leave during his State of the Union address and it's time for Congress to get to work on this issue that has a major impact on people's everyday lives. In the 115th Congress, members in both the House and Senate and from both sides of the aisle have introduced paid leave legislation recognizing that moms and dads across the country are trying to figure out how to ensure their babies are well-cared for and nurtured in those precious first few weeks of life.

As a conservative there are a few things that I look for when studying options for paid leave legislation, first, employers should not be loaded with one-size-fits-all mandates; second, we should steer away from expanding the footprint of the federal government and third, we should not increase taxes.

As a mother and a grandmother I recognize the need for our policies to reflect the evolving needs of our workforce and to reduce barriers that pose challenges to parents, balancing families and their work. That's why I'm encouraged to learn more about a path forward that would create a voluntary budget-neutral paid leave program rather than impose a new entitlement or mandate. This idea is accessible, it's creative and straight-forward and can serve as a good launch pad for discussions that I will have with my colleagues as we set out soliciting input from various stakeholders and constituents and hopefully considering this legislation in Congress.

I look forward to working on this important issue of paid leave. I appreciate the wonderful support that we've gotten so far. Again, Carrie and Kristin, thanks for all that you've been able to contribute to this important topic. Thanks everyone.

CARRIE LUKAS: Thank you Senator. I'd now like to welcome Senator Mike Lee from Utah, to make a statement.

SEN. MIKE LEE: Thank you Carrie for that kind introduction and thanks Kristin for all the work you've done on this issue. And yes, thank you to the Independent Women's Forum for making this call happen in the first place.

So much of my work here in the Senate has focused on how we as conservatives can reform the federal government so that it works for working families and not against them. This is why I work so hard with Senator Rubio and with Ivanka Trump last year, to make sure that the expanded Child Tax Credit was included in the tax reform package. And it's also why I'm so intrigued with Ms. Shapiro's novel approach to the family leave issue. Translating Ms. Shapiro's idea into a workable legislative product that adheres to conservative principles while simultaneously allowing the government to work better for working families would be a huge win for the American people.

Now we started digging into this issue a few weeks ago with Ms. Shapiro and Andrew Biggs and Senator Rubio and a few other friends both on Capitol Hill and off the Hill. As you might imagine, turning good ideas into good legislation takes time. Getting this right means asking the right questions and then figuring out how to answer them.

Some of the questions we're working through right now includes some of the following, first, how can we make sure that this proposal won't just hasten the Social Security trust funds, the 2034 insolvency date? And second, how can benefits be structured so that the benefits are delivered when families need it? Third, we're confronting the question of how should this proposal interact with existing family leave law and how should it deal with small and large employers alike? Now we're optimistic about our ability to answer each of these questions and part of the reason for that optimism is the help of and the interest expressed by everyone on this call.

So I'm really excited to be investigating this proposal and I want to thank Ms. Shapiro and the Independent Women's Forum for offering this precious solution.

CARRIE LUKAS: So wonderful, thank you Senator. I'd like to welcome Caleb Orr who handles economic policy for Senator Marco Rubio, to make a statement on Senator Rubio's behalf.

CALEB ORR (SEN. MARCO RUBIO): Thank you Carrie and thank you for hosting this call. Senator Rubio sends his regards. He had to be on an unexpected flight. My name is Caleb Orr, Legislative Assistant to Senator Rubio. I'll be reading a statement from him.

Conservatives are pro family. The modern economy has placed new and unique burdens on working moms and dads that make it harder to start and raise a family and we should address that. I am working to craft a plan that works for working families.

As the Independent Women's Forum and Kristin Shapiro have outlined, a paid parental leave program that increases family flexibility in a fiscally responsible way would not only represent conservatism meeting the challenges of 21st century, it would remain true to Social Security's fundamental principle of providing assistance to dependents in our care.

Expanding the Child Tax Credit was Step 1. With the president's support, I look forward to continuing our efforts for working American families by passing paid family leave. Thank you.

CARRIE LUKAS: Wonderful. Thank you very much. Before we take questions, here's a little background on how we got to this moment in the debate.

Independent Women's Forum has long studied and written about the paid leave issue because we recognize that it is a critical issue for many American families. We've opposed the most common policy proposals advanced to increase access to paid leave because they have significant downsides, particularly for women.

A mandate on employers requiring that they must provide paid leave to all workers would raise employment cost and reduce the number of jobs available, particularly for women. A new paid leave entitlement program would require a new payroll tax taking money out of the pocket of all workers. It would also discourage true workplace flexibility and potentially negatively impact the millions of workers who are satisfied with their compensation arrangement.

IWF has consistently brought together leading policy analysts to identify better ways to approach this issue. Last month IWF published a paper by Kristin Shapiro outlining her unique proposal to reform the Social Security program to give workers the option of accessing paid leave then paid - accessing parental leave benefits after the birth or adoption of a child in exchange for delaying their retirement benefits to offset those costs.

We see the benefits of this approach is numerous. It would provide needed support for everyone who lacks paid leave but without affecting all workers who are satisfied with their current arrangements. It would be voluntary, encourage a sense of personal responsibility and would not increase the federal government's deficit or outstanding liabilities. We believe that this proposal would be a step in the right direction making our safety net stronger and more efficient without needlessly growing government. And we believe this can attract bipartisan support.

We've welcomed and appreciated the White House's leadership in making this issue of paid leave a priority and I encourage everyone to visit IWF.org for more information and to read that paper written by Kristin Shapiro. If you joined the call late, IWF will have a complete transcript and audio MP3. Please contact our press team to receive that information and you can email them at Press@IWF.org.

And again thank you very much for joining us this morning.

OPERATOR: And once again that does conclude today's call. We thank you for your participation, you may now disconnect.