

STATEMENT BY SEN. BERNARD SANDERS ON FAMILY VALUES AGENDA

When my Republican colleagues talk about “family values,” what they usually mean is opposition to a woman’s right to choose, opposition to contraception, opposition to gay rights. Let me today give a somewhat different perspective on family values – on real family values.

When a mother has a baby and is unable to spend time with that child during the first weeks and months of that baby’s life, and is forced back to work because of a lack of money, that is not a family value. That is an attack on everything that a family is supposed to stand for. When a wife is diagnosed with cancer and a husband cannot get time off of work to take care of her, that is not a family value. That is an attack on everything that a family is supposed to stand for. When a mother is forced to send her sick child to school because she cannot afford to stay home with her that is not a family value. That is an attack on everything that a family is supposed to stand for. When a husband, wife, and kids, during the course of an entire year, are unable to spend any time together on vacation - that is not a family value. That is an attack on everything that a family is supposed to stand for.

Let's be clear: in terms of protecting the needs of our families, in terms of real family values, in many respects the United States lags behind virtually every major country on earth.

When you look at what other wealthy countries are doing, what you find is that the United States of America is the only advanced economy that does not guarantee its workers some form of paid family leave, paid sick time or paid vacation time. In other words, when it comes to basic workplace protections and family benefits, workers in every other major industrialized country in the world get a better deal than workers in the United States. That is wrong. That is a travesty. And that has got to change.

Last place is no place for America. It is time to join the rest of the industrialized world by showing the people of this country that we are not just a nation that talks about family values but that we are a nation that is prepared to live up to these ideals by making sure that workers in this country have access to paid family leave, paid sick time and paid vacations just like workers in every other wealthy country on earth.

Simply stated it is an outrage that millions of women in this country give birth and then are forced back to work because they don't have the income to stay home with their newborn babies. Virtually every psychologist who has studied this issue understands that the first weeks and months of life are enormously important in terms of the

emotional and intellectual development of that person. And what is most important is the need for mothers and fathers to bond with the baby they have brought to life. What kind of family value is it when you tell a woman who has just had a baby that she can't spend time with that child, but that she has to go back to work? That is not a family value. That is an insult to every mother, father and baby in this country and that has got to change.

The reality is that the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) that was signed into law in 1993 is totally inadequate. Today, nearly 8 out of 10 workers in this country who are eligible to take time off under this law cannot do so because they could not afford it (according to the Department of Labor). Even worse, 40 percent of American workers are not even eligible to receive this unpaid leave because they work for a company with fewer than 50 employees.

In my view, every worker in America should be guaranteed at least 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave – and that is why I am supporting – the FAMILY Act – introduced by Senator Gillibrand.

The FAMILY Act would guarantee employees 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave to take care of a baby; to help a family member who is diagnosed with cancer or has some other serious medical condition; or to take care of themselves if they become seriously ill. And just like Social Security retirement and disability, it is an

insurance program that workers would pay into, at a price of about one cup of coffee a week.

But that's not all. We have also got to make sure that workers in this country have paid sick time. In my view, it is absurd that low wage workers in McDonald's who get sick are forced to work because they cannot afford to miss work. Not only is this bad for the workers who are sick, it is also a public health issue.

That is why I am supporting the Healthy Families Act, introduced by Sen. Patty Murray, which guarantees seven days of paid sick leave to American workers. This bill would benefit 43 million Americans who don't already have access to paid sick leave, and it would create a permanent floor in workplaces where employers already provide some paid sick leave.

Last but not least, when we are talking about a collapsing middle class, we're talking about millions of Americans working longer hours for lower wages. We're talking about millions of Americans who are overworked, underpaid, and under enormous stress.

One hundred years ago workers in this country took to the streets demanding a 40 hour work week. And here we are 100 years later, living in the most technologically advanced economy in human history, and we *still* don't have 40-hour workweek! In fact, 85% of working

men and 66% of working women are working more than 40 hours a week. What we have are millions of people, working incredible hours – some with two or three jobs – just trying to care for themselves and their families. Americans now work, by far, the longest hours of any major country on earth -137 hours a year more hours than workers in Japan, 260 hours more than the British and 499 hours more than French workers.

That is why I am introducing legislation today to require employers to provide at least 10 days of paid vacation to workers in this country. This is already done in almost every country in the world, and it is one more way to demonstrate our commitment to Family Values. So what we are talking about is a proposal to allow workers to take two weeks of paid leave so that they can rest and recuperate, travel the country, visit loved ones or simply spend time at home, bonding with their families.

This is not something that would just benefit workers and their families but also their employers and even society as a whole. Studies show that 9 in 10 Americans report that their happiest memories come from vacations. And while companies like Virgin Group and Netflix have adopted generous paid vacation policies, aimed at boosting productivity and worker loyalty, nearly 1 in 4 workers gets no paid

vacation time. Research shows that vacations reduce stress, strengthen family relationships, increase productivity and even prevent illness.

There is no reason we should not do this. There is no reason that American workers should be denied a benefit that workers in every other advanced economy already enjoy. Again, when you compare the United States to other rich countries in Europe, Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, you discover that we are the only one in the group that doesn't require employers to provide at least 10 days of paid vacation time. We are every bit as prosperous as they are, and the reason we are so prosperous is because the men and women of this country work so hard.

I am not asking for the most generous vacation policy in the world – nothing like what they get in France, Austria or Belgium – but I am going to push for a standard befitting a great nation that takes seriously its commitment to Family Values.