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## MEMO

### **New Survey Shows Strong Bipartisan Support for a Comprehensive National Paid Family and Medical Leave Policy Funded Jointly by Employees and Employers.**

In a new survey by research firms PerryUdem (non-partisan) and Bellwether Research & Consulting (Republican), voters across party lines – including strong majorities of Republican voters – find consensus in their support for a national paid family and medical leave policy.<sup>1</sup> While other polls have consistently found support for national paid leave, this new study shows voters of all parties, ages and regions want a *comprehensive* policy that will not only cover new parents but also those dealing with serious illness, caring for a family member dealing with serious illness, or who are affected by the military deployment of a family member. Pluralities of voters, including Republicans, prefer that employers and employees share the costs of this program and solid majorities are willing to pay personally for this national policy through a small payroll tax, while few support drawing early from Social Security.

Key survey findings are below, followed by recommendations on messaging:

- **There is strong support for a comprehensive national paid family and medical leave plan.** Eight in ten voters (84%) and three-fourths (75%) of Republicans support a comprehensive, inclusive, sustainably funded plan that includes all working people for all serious family and medical needs established in the FMLA (to care for a new child, their own illness, an ill family member or to deal with the impacts of a military deployment).
- **The most popular proposal would extend paid leave to *all* working people who need to care for a new child, an ill family member, their own illness, or for military family care.** Employees and employers would share the cost through a payroll tax that would go into a national fund. Working people would receive 66 percent of their usual pay, up to a \$4000 monthly cap, for up to 12 weeks. Eight in 10 voters (80%) support this proposal and when asked to rank four policy ideas from best to worst, this plan was the top choice across party ID (Republicans 76%; Independents 74%; Democrats 89%).
- **More than eight-in-ten (82%) voters, including 71% of Republicans, think the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) needs to be updated to reflect the changing needs of the workforce** and that the current program which offers unpaid leave is unaffordable, and therefore not an option, for most working people and families.

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<sup>1</sup> The survey of 1,004 registered voters was sponsored by the National Partnership for Women & Families. The survey was conducted July 9-23, 2018 using NORC's AmeriSpeak nationally representative panel at the University of Chicago. The margin of sampling error on the total results: +/- 4.3 percentage points.

- **More than seven-in-ten Republicans (73%) and 80% of all voters support finding new revenue to fund a national paid leave program.** Voters prefer that employees and employers share the costs of paid leave (38%) over any other type of funding approach by quite a large margin. The next most popular is having employers alone pay for it (21%) or having it come from the federal budget, even if that means a tax increase (19%). The shared-cost preference holds across party lines and income levels: the joint employee-employer funding model is the top choice for Republicans (43%), Independents (37%) and Democrats (34%). Just 2% of Republicans preferred funding paid leave through drawing early from Social Security.
- **A majority oppose a paid leave proposal that would only apply to new parents and would be paid for from Social Security earnings.** The survey tested four proposals for a national paid leave policy. One similar to the recent Rubio proposal, which would allow new parents to use Social Security to fund only paid parental leave by delaying retirement and taking a benefit cut, was the least popular among voters, including Republicans. Fewer than 1 in 10 voters said this was their preferred choice for a paid leave policy.
- **Voters overwhelmingly recognize that only a small percentage of workers are offered paid family and medical leave right now.** Nearly 3 in 4 voters think only a small segment of workers are offered paid leave, while only 8 percent believe most people who work are offered paid family and medical leave. (In reality, only 15% of employees have designated paid family leave at their jobs and less than 40% have personal medical leave through an employers' temporary disability program.) Most say they would feel angry, sad, frustrated or stressed if *they* were kept from caring for a loved one.
- **To fill this gap, most voters believe any plan should cover all working people, regardless of employment situation, job or wage level.** Large majorities (80%) across party lines think it is important any approach to paid leave also cover self-employed, freelance, and contract workers – a growing segment of the electorate. Large majorities (82%) also think it is important for a national paid leave plan to be available and affordable for both higher wage, management-level people **and** to middle-level and lower-wage front-line workers.
- **Many feel a personal stake in this issue.** More than 1 in 2 voters (53%) – and 72% of those ages 18 to 44 – think a national paid family and medical leave policy could help them, now or in the future, and another one-fifth (19%) wouldn't rule it out. Nearly four-in-ten Republicans could envision a national paid leave policy helping them personally and, among this group, 74% say it would allow them to care for an elderly, ill or disabled family member, 73% say it could help them with their own illness or injury, and 50% say they could use it for maternity or child care.
- **And, most think that families face serious financial difficulties without paid leave.** Two-thirds of voters (66%) say they would face serious financial hardships if they had to take up to a few months of unpaid leave, including 64% of Republicans (and 70% of Republican women). Nearly half of women (48%) say serious financial hardships would be very likely. And, 9 in 10 voters do not think most people who work in the U.S. can afford to take up to a few months of unpaid time off from their job if they have a new child, a serious illness or injury, or a family member who is seriously ill, injured, or disabled.

- **Voters are on board to help share the costs of a paid leave fund.** The survey suggests most voters are willing to contribute to a paid leave fund in amounts higher than existing state paid leave programs – now in place in four states and soon to be implemented in two more plus D.C. (actually cost or that the Democrats’ FAMILY Act is projected to cost. Seven in 10 are willing to contribute 1% of their wages, or 1 cent for every dollar earned); lower income voters are even more likely to be willing to contribute this amount than higher income voters. Large majorities of Republicans (64%), Independents (67%) and Democrats (83%), are willing to contribute at least 1% of their wages.
- **Supporting a comprehensive national paid leave policy is smart politics, regardless of party.** Seven in ten voters (70%), and majorities of every partisan voting group, say their party should support a comprehensive national paid family and medical leave policy that covers all working people. In addition, the overwhelming majority of voters – including 72% of Republicans (79% of Republican women), 77% of Independents and 95% of Democrats – say it is important for this year’s congressional candidates to support a comprehensive national paid family and medical leave plan. This sentiment is translated into their voting preferences, too. For younger voters and women, it is especially important that candidates support a comprehensive plan and could be a motivating voting issue in November.

Looking ahead, here is some suggested messaging advice on the issue of a national paid family and medical leave policy for elected officials, candidates and others interested in this issue.

1. **A comprehensive policy starts from a position of strength.** Voters, including most Republican voters, support a comprehensive national paid family and medical leave policy that covers everyone. They feel narrow parental leave policies are not enough. This is a settled matter for them, and you can feel comfortable advocating for it. Voters are looking for elected officials as well as 2018 candidates to support a comprehensive policy.
2. **Draw on voters’ own experiences, particularly with elder care – the top reason given by Republicans who see paid leave benefiting them.** A majority of voters have already dealt with a serious personal or family medical need or the arrival of a child that forced them to make sacrifices. And most voters say they would face financial duress if they had to take months of unpaid leave to care for a new child, an ill family member, their own illness, or are impacted by a military deployment. Voters believe that a national paid leave policy fills a gap that will improve families’ financial security and that no one should miss the important first moments in their children’s lives or the last moments of their loved ones’. Ground your support for national paid leave in tangible examples of how it could help voters in the future, particularly in caring for an older or ill family member.
3. **Child and family care issues are especially acute in rural areas.** Child care options are often severely lacking in rural areas and voters who live in these areas struggle not only with finding quality child care, but also quite frequently need to travel long distances to get to work or access health care. Many work in jobs that do not offer flex time to deal with family and child care issues and to do so might require a full day off of work due to the distance it takes to access a health care provider. A national paid family leave policy would benefit all Americans, especially those who live in rural areas.

4. **Highlight current disparities in leave policies, especially in changing economy.** Most voters think (correctly) that only a small segment of workers currently have access to paid leave. But, they think all workers – including self-employed and contract workers, and higher-, middle- and lower income workers – should have these benefits. Focus on how most Americans would stand to gain from a national, comprehensive policy. It could also be useful to highlight how people who are working within the growing gig-economy will benefit.
5. **Advocate for a shared employee-employer contribution model.** Although voters can be wary of any changes to worker wages, the survey shows they are overwhelmingly willing to pay for paid leave benefits and are most supportive of a funding model that shares contributions between employee and employers. Focus groups among conservative and independent voters also suggested this was viewed as a reasonable approach with voters. This is a good and safe place for you to be on this issue.
6. **Social Security is the least popular funding mechanism.** This idea is hugely unpopular with voters across the political spectrum and is seen as the least palatable policy approach moving forward. While it is laudable that legislators are working to find an approach to increase paid family leave, voters – including Republicans – want to see employees and employers share this responsibility.

For more information about this survey, please contact:

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