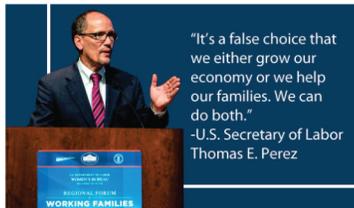




Working Families Across the Country: Highlights of the Department of Labor's Regional Forums

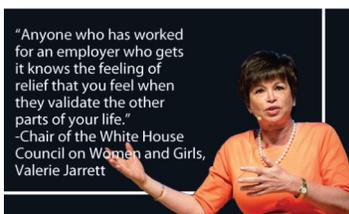
During this year's State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama said, "[A woman] deserves to have a baby without sacrificing her job. A mother deserves a day off to care for a sick child or sick



parent without running into hardship - and you know what, a father does, too." Unfortunately, the outmoded policies exercised by many of today's workplaces

fail to provide basic supports such as these, often forcing today's working families to make difficult trade-offs between work and family obligations. At the June 23 Summit on Working Families, the White House Council on Women and Girls, the Department of Labor and the Center for American Progress will address these issues toward setting an agenda for a 21st century workplace that works for all Americans.

We at the Department of Labor strive to fulfill our vision of promoting and protecting opportunity for all workers and employers, understanding that the issues that working families face are nationwide, and therefore require nationwide insight from working families and employers. That is why this spring, the Women's Bureau convened forums and roundtables in cities across the United States. These events brought together high-ranking Administration officials; researchers; advocates; businesses; unions; and federal, state and local elected officials and generated conversations about the challenges working families face, successful business practices, and the administration's goals for addressing these issues.



Some themes emerged repeatedly: We heard that workers need better wages to achieve economic security and flexible leave policies that allow

them to balance the demands of work and family. We also heard that access to paid leave and sick days, equal pay, job training and affordable child care benefit families and businesses, which see boosts to employee morale, productivity and retention in conjunction with implementation of policies that support working families.

ATLANTA

The April 10 forum featured a panel of leaders from the Atlanta community, and several nonprofits sent representatives to discuss pay equality and the challenges encountered by working families. "You shouldn't have to risk your job to take care of your family and you shouldn't have to risk your family to take care of your job," said Carlis V. Williams, regional administrator for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families. Discussions focused on the benefits of a higher minimum wage and paid leave for working families. Such policies can lead to greater financial security for families and economic benefits, such as higher productivity and lower turnover rates for businesses.

DENVER

Focusing on leave policy, expansion of paid sick days and state-run family and medical leave, the April 11 forum emphasized how workplace policies can improve the lives of working families while benefiting businesses. Workers and business leaders shared their perspectives on a range of issues, including recent

local initiatives on paid leave. Also, Office of Personnel Management Director Katherine Archuleta delivered a keynote address highlighting ways the federal government serves as a model employer on leave and workplace flexibility. Other participants emphasized the importance of access to paid family and medical leave, noting that families who have access to paid leave have greater economic security.

CHICAGO

Creating workplaces that provide Americans the opportunity to get ahead and ensure they remain globally competitive was the focus of the April 28 forum in Chicago. The panelists touched on these and other issues before an audience of business leaders and workers' advocates. The speakers discussed workplace policies that benefit both businesses and employees, such as providing fair wages, access to paid leave and practices that promote work-life balance, as being key to economic prosperity. They also discussed the importance of mobility and leadership tracks for working women as well as the challenges women face in STEM careers and other non-traditional occupations. In a panel discussion, participants noted that women need to advocate for themselves at work, but that employers, policymakers and advocates also have a role to play in building supportive policies.

NEW YORK

U.S. Labor Secretary Thomas E. Perez addressed a full house in New York on May 12, telling attendees that they are leaders in fighting for issues important to working families. Valerie Jarrett, Chair of the White House Council on Women and Girls, argued that workplace gender equality is worth fighting for and enforcing until each of America's workers has equal access to employment opportunities. Okenfe Lebarty, an organizer for the group New Jersey Citizen Action, said he traveled to the forum in the hope of bringing back knowledge and tools to help tackle an entrenched problem facing families in the Garden State. "Currently, some 1.2 million private sector workers in the state have no access to paid sick days at all," he said. Speakers highlighted successful public solutions to challenges facing working families and noted that the best policies recognize that workers have personal commitments

and establish workplace cultures that support workers in their efforts to achieve personal and professional success, regardless of gender.

BOSTON-CAMBRIDGE

The issue of working families can pack a room in Massachusetts. New Englanders met in Cambridge on May 19 to discuss occupational segregation, the pay gap and the economic benefits of policies that help working families succeed. Speakers stressed the long-standing need to address pay inequity, provide paid sick leave, and embrace policies that support working families and grow the economy. Attendees also heard from a small business owner who has successfully implemented such policies and a Rhode Island legislator who championed the passage of temporary caregiver insurance. Participants discussed in depth the economic benefits of policies that help working families succeed and the modest progress that has been made in recent decades. Speakers also noted that while women are more likely to take on family care responsibilities, both men and women benefit from supportive workplace environments.

SAN FRANCISCO

Speakers at the May 27 San Francisco forum highlighted the challenges faced by working families and discussed possible solutions to these challenges, including access to affordable child care, paid leave and higher wages. Speakers reflected on the success of California's paid leave program, which was launched 10 years ago. However, event participants acknowledged that more work remains to be done, and that too many workers are forced to choose between putting food on the table and being home to share that food at the table with their families.

Although every city and every family provided a unique perspective, common threads ran throughout, underscoring the benefits of living wages and paid family and medical leave policies for workers, businesses and the economy. We recognize the importance of these issues for families and businesses around the nation, and we look forward to continuing the conversation.

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