



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on March 6, 2019

GOP to Push Paid Family Leave Program in Bid to Win Women's Votes

With Democrats competing against each other to see who can be the most socialist, Republicans, it seems, have decided to get into the game by pushing for a federal program of paid family leave for private-sector employees.

According to [Roll Call](#), four Republican lawmakers — Utah Senator Mike Lee, Iowa Senator Joni Ernst, Louisiana Senator Bill Cassidy, and Missouri Representative Ann Wagner — are currently working on legislation to mandate that employers grant their employees a certain amount of family leave, with the government paying those employees during their leave. And that's just the beginning of what the newspaper says will be "a surge of paid leave proposals from Republicans in the run-up to 2020."



Most Republicans voted against the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act, which forces employers to grant up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to workers for various reasons. Today, however, the GOP is reconsidering this stance, partly because of pressure from President Donald Trump and his daughter, Ivanka Trump, and partly out of a desire to regain the suburban-women's vote that shifted toward Democrats in the midterm elections.

"If we are going to be a majority party again, we have got to have a party that looks more like America, that looks not just like our rural areas that are so wonderful across our country, but also that looks more like urban and suburban [America]," Wagner told the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#) in December.

At last week's Conservative Political Action Conference, former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum, who voted against the 1993 legislation, argued it's time for the GOP to get on board with paid family leave.

"This is a new subject area for conservatives. It's not new for the other side," he said. "What we need to do is try to define the debate and talk about how important this is for the future.... This can be a winning issue for us."

Strictly from an electoral standpoint, Santorum may be right. Polls consistently show that voters in both parties favor a paid family leave program — everyone wants something for nothing — and women, in particular, like the idea.

"A lot of swing women voters are up for grabs in the next election," Olivia Perez-Cubas, a spokeswoman for Winning for Women, a group dedicated to electing Republican women, told *Roll Call*. "This could be one of those issues that brings them in."



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Democrats have already proposed their own paid family leave bill. Introduced by New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and Connecticut Representative Rosa DeLauro, it would create a new social-insurance program administered by the Social Security Administration to pay employees on leave.

The various GOP plans differ only in that rather than create a new program, they “allow new parents to draw from future Social Security benefits to finance their leave,” reported *Roll Call*. This allows Republicans to claim they are not “impos[ing] a new entitlement or mandate,” as Ernst said in a statement.

It does not, however, enable the GOP to claim to be the party of the Constitution and limited government. The Constitution, after all, does not empower the federal government to interfere in employers’ internal policies, and a small government would not do so.

Moreover, the bill imposes some serious costs despite its proponents’ assertions that it is, as Ernst put it, “budget-neutral.” In the first place, businesses have to deal with the disruptions of employees who take advantage of the program, not least of which is finding someone else to do the work that an employee on leave would otherwise be doing. In the second place, Social Security, which pays current retirees via taxes on current workers ([the Social Security Trust Fund is a myth](#)), is already [shelling out more than it takes in](#); allowing people to draw benefits in advance of retirement will only increase this deficit and hasten the program’s demise.

Republicans may win some votes with a paid leave bill, but their already meager credibility as proponents of small government will take yet another hit. Then again, given the choice between the party that happily gives them alleged freebies and one that claims to oppose it while doing so on the cheap, voters, like Coca-Cola drinkers, might just choose the real thing.

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