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NEWSLETTER OF THE
**Labor Project for
 Working Families**

LaborFamilyNEWS

PARTNERING WITH UNIONS TO PUT FAMILIES *first* WINTER 2009

VALUE FAMILIES AT WORK!

Unions push Obama Administration to prioritize work family policies

BY VIBHUTI MEHRA

Faced with a greater risk of unemployment and poverty than ever before, each day millions of working Americans are being forced to make an impossible choice between caring for their families and holding on to their jobs. Addressing and remedying this dilemma is an integral part of broader national efforts to rebuild family economic security and a prosperous economy in the United States. Now, it is more important than ever that our workers receive the support they need through family friendly workplace policies and programs.

PUTTING FAMILY VALUES TO WORK

As President-elect Barack Obama and his new Administration prepare to take seat in the White House, a broad group of labor unions, work family advocacy groups and community organizations across the country have joined hands to put forth the *Valuing Families at Work* agenda listing family friendly priorities for federal action in 2009 and beyond. The goals of this national agenda are:

milies at Work is part of the broader effort for economic security including issues such as increased minimum wage, affordable and quality health care, high quality child care and public education with well trained and well compensated teachers and passage of the Employee Free Choice Act. Enabling workers to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities without risking their job or wages will help eliminate barriers for women in the workfor

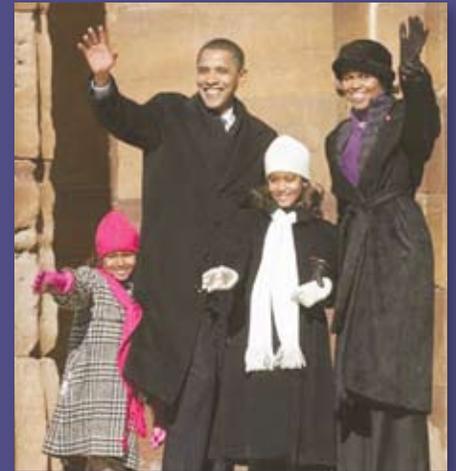
These new, enforceable workplace standards would apply to families at all income levels and of all types, including same-sex couples.

UNIONS DEMAND ACTION

Unions recognize that support for *Valuing Families at Work* is part of the broader effort for economic security including issues such as increased minimum wage, affordable and quality health care, high quality child care

and public education with well trained and well compensated teachers and passage of the Employee Free Choice Act. Enabling workers to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities without risking their job or wages will help eliminate barriers for women in the workforce, improve public health and enhance economic security for working Americans. According to American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten, "Unions helped to establish the American middle class – an essential element in the engine that drives the American economy. The *Valuing Families at Work* agenda continues this long and proud labor tradition. In these tough economic times, unions, business and support America's struggling working families to earn livable wages and receive benefits necessary to raise healthy, well-cared for children, and get our economy back on track."

In his presidential campaign, President-elect Obama promised to tackle work family issues such as paid sick days, paid family and medical leave, and flexible work schedules. *Valuing Families at Work* offers an opportunity to hold our new President to his promises. Service Employees International Union (SEIU) President Andy Stern states, "Union families, like millions of American families, have spoken powerfully for change and now they expect action. ensated teachers and passage of the Employee



The First Family:
 Unions and work family organizations hope to see Obama prioritize working families' needs

Free Choice Act. Enabling workers to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities without risking their job or wages will help eliminate barriers We need to rebuild our economy, and passing the *Valuing Families at Work* agenda will help us begin to do that. Workers should not have to risk their jobs in order to care for their families or put their loved ones at risk in order to do their jobs."

The *Valuing Families at Work* agenda was initiated by the Multi-State Working Families Consortium and the National Partnership for list of supporters are available at http://www.working-families.org/organize/valuing_families.pdf. To sign your union on to the *Valuing Families at Work* agenda, email info@working-families.org.

What's the **INSIDE STORY** on...

LGBT FAMILIES



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IN DEFENSE OF EQUALITY:

Unions Stand Up for LGBT Families

BY BRANDY DAVIS

In the 2008 election, Californians went to the ballot box in record numbers and cast votes on one of the most expensive and high profile initiatives in the country: Proposition 8, an initiative that would define marriage as between a man and a woman and eliminate the right of same sex couples to marry. Prominently standing in opposition to Proposition 8 were many California labor unions. Labor's support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) workers also goes beyond the ballot box. Unions across the country are bargaining for contracts that are inclusive of LGBT workers and their families in a critical area: equality in workplace benefits.

With the political climate in flux over same-sex marriage, LGBT families face an uncertain prospect of securing workplace benefits that enable them to keep their jobs and care for their families, including family and sick leave, and health and pension benefits. Only

16 states and the District of Columbia have domestic partnership laws that formerly recognize same-sex relationships. Equal Benefits Ordinances, which require government contractors to provide equal benefits to their LGBT workers, exist in only one state and a handful of localities. LGBT families were not included in the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and only seven states have extended such benefits to unmarried partners in their state family and medical leave laws. Because Internal Revenue Service rules deny domestic partners the same tax benefits as spouses, LGBT workers who do have access to domestic partner benefits face additional tax burdens. According to T Santora, Co-President of Pride At Work, an AFL-CIO constituency group for LGBT workers in the labor movement, "The patchwork of legal protections across the country underscores the reason why a union contract is an LGBT worker's best friend."

DOMESTIC PARTNER BENEFITS ON THE RISE

Since workers at the Village Voice in New York City and the United Auto Workers (UAW) first negotiated domestic partner benefits in 1982, a growing number of employers have followed. As of March 2006, 49% of the Fortune 500 offered domestic partner health benefits, compared to 25% in 2000. The trend toward domestic partner benefits is increasing regardless of business size, although the most substantial gains are among large employers. But many public and private sector LGBT workers do not have access to these benefits. In a 2003 study, 48% of LGBT workers identified domestic partner benefits as the most important consideration in a potential job change. And where state and federal laws provide little to no rights, union contracts provide the only protection.

Workplace benefits make up nearly 40% of overall compensation. Without full access to these benefits, LGBT workers are being denied a significant portion of their overall compensation. Refusing to offer these benefits deprives LGBT workers of one of the most important facets of their work: the ability to care and provide for their families. And although one purpose for workplace benefits is to improve workers' focus, performance and retention, leaving out LGBT workers excludes a large portion of the workforce. Appearing before the US Senate, the President of Human Rights Campaign, Joe Solmonese, testified

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Anti-Prop 8 Rally in Philadelphia:

The passage of Proposition 8, banning same sex marriage in California, sparked protests across the nation.

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that “LGBT workers experience the same levels of stress, lack of productivity, distraction and fear of job loss as do others when their domestic partners become ill, are hospitalized or cared for by others.”

Today’s union members can be guided by decades of fighting for equal benefits for LGBT workers. In 1991, the AFL-CIO issued a policy resolution on “Benefits for Changing Families” that read: “The AFL-CIO will work as appropriate to insure that fringe benefits are extended to all persons living in a household as a family.” The resolution acknowledged that eligibility for benefits is typically based on a definition of family that fails to account for changes to family composition. The number of unmarried households is a large and growing percentage, and its growth is outpacing married households.

“The patchwork of legal protections across the country underscores the reason why a union contract is an LGBT worker’s best friend.”

– T Santora, Co-President of Pride At Work

UNIONS PUSH FOR BENEFITS FOR ALL

Pride At Work publishes a guide for bargaining for domestic partner benefits titled “Seven Easy Steps For Adding Domestic Partner Benefits To Your Union Contract” (see box). According to the guide, a critical first step in bargaining for these benefits is to ensure your contract has a clause protecting workers from discrimination on the job based on sexual orientation and gender identity. “A non-discrimination clause sets out a framework in which to negotiate equal benefits for LGBT workers,” stated

T Santora. Equal benefits are a logical extension of a workplace policy prohibiting discrimination against LGBT workers. Only 30 states have laws that prohibit discrimination against LGBT workers and there is no federal law that provides this protection. LGBT workers also need to be protected from discrimination when they reveal their sexual orientation to access domestic partner benefits. T Santora recommends that all contracts include a clause that same-sex partners and their children be treated as spouses and family members for all purposes in the contract.

Many unions are at the forefront of innovation in domestic partner benefits, and success in bargaining can lead to broader policy change. In New York City, AFSCME District Council 37 (DC37) bargained for domestic partner benefits in the early 1990’s, including health insurance coverage and bereavement leave. Bargaining led to policy change in 1998, when DC 37 lobbied for the passage of legislation that made domestic partners equal to married spouses under all New York City government rules and policies.

In Michigan, the Graduate Employees Organization, Local 3550, AFT are promoting a plan for “Benefits for All.” After winning contracts that provided domestic partner benefits to Graduate Student Instructors and Staff Assistants at the University of Michigan, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled in May 2008 that an amendment to the state constitution prohibits public employers from providing benefits based on a same-sex relationship, including health benefits. The “Benefits for All” plan responds to this policy change by proposing a benefit structure not based on marriage, but a new system of Designated Beneficiaries.

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL . . .

In 2005, Marvin Burrows lost his partner of 51 years, Bill Swenor. When Bill died, Marvin was denied continued health coverage and Bill’s union pension, forcing him to move from their

BARGAIN SMART

If you are bargaining for workplace benefits that are inclusive of LGBT families, check out these resources:

Seven Easy Steps for Adding Domestic Partner Benefits to Your Contract, Pride At Work.

To find this easy-to-use guide, go to prideatwork.org and look under “Our Issues.”

Achieving Domestic Partner Benefits, AFSCME.

Clear, concise bargaining tips and success stories. To find go to <http://www.afscme.org/publications/9729.cfm>

How to Achieve Domestic Partner Benefits in Your Workplace, Human Rights Campaign.

Human Rights Campaign also has a searchable employer database with information on employment policies and practices relating to LGBT employees. To find, go to www.hrc.org.

home of 35 years. With the help of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, a request was sent to Bill’s union, the International Longshore Workers Union (ILWU), to reconsider the denial of these benefits. Two years later, Marvin received a response that read, “During recent negotiations...the Pension Agreement was changed to provide domestic partners the same rights to benefits as a spouse. This change was made retroactive to March 1, 2005 and will now allow Mr. Burrows to receive a benefit on behalf of Mr. Swenor.” In response to this decision, T Santora said, “We are hopeful that this action will influence other unions to follow suit...and ensure that Marvin’s experience becomes a part of history, not a continuing reality for others. By taking this action, the ILWU demonstrated its commitment to the union principle that an injury to one is an injury to all.”

UNIONS WIN IT!

WHAT: Paid School Participation Leave

WHERE: Michigan

WHO: United Auto Workers (UAW) & Blue Care Network of Michigan

UAW members employed by the Blue Care Network of Michigan can receive eight hours of paid School Participation Leave annually. Employees can request and utilize the leave in increments of one hour to actively participate in any educational activity including, but not limited to, tutoring, field trips, classroom programs, school committees and preschool programs.

WHAT: Adoption Assistance Plans

WHERE: Western Carolina

WHO: Communications Workers of America (CWA) & Verizon South, Inc

Full and part-time Verizon South employees represented by the CWA can offset the cost of adoption by participating in the company's Adoption Assistance Plan. The plan allows the employees to claim reimbursement of adoption related expenses up to \$10,000 per adopted child.

WHAT: Maternity, Paternity, Adoption Leave

WHERE: Minnesota

WHO: American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Locals 3937 & 3801 & University of Minnesota

Members of AFSCME Locals 3937 & 3801 employed by the University of Minnesota can get an unpaid leave of absence for maternity, paternity, or adoption for a period of up to six months following the birth or adoption of a child by either the employee or the employee's registered same sex domestic partner. Employees can also request to extend the leave for a period of up to six months.

Have you bargained for new work family language lately?

LEARN WorkFamily, is currently seeking submissions from unions that have negotiated good work family contract language.

To submit your contract language go to www.learnworkfamily.org. For more information e-mail info@working-families.org or call 510-643-7088.



Join LEARN WorkFamily – A FREE online resource network that features a database of contract language on work family issues such as family leave, child care, elder care, flexible work options, adoption benefits and much more!

www.learnworkfamily.org

NEWS WORTHY

■ **MILWAUKEE PASSES PAID SICK DAYS** In November, Milwaukee residents overwhelmingly voted in favor of a union/community-backed referendum calling for private employers to provide paid sick leave to all workers. The city follows San Francisco and Washington DC in guaranteeing a minimum amount of paid sick days to employees. The referendum gives full-time workers between 5 and 9 paid sick days a year depending on the size of the employer. The Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce is challenging the law as unconstitutional and alleging that it will put the city at a competitive disadvantage.

■ **IN SAN FRANCISCO IT'S BUSINESS AS USUAL AFTER PAID SICK DAYS** A new report on San Francisco's Paid Sick Days law shows that Milwaukee's Association of Commerce has nothing to worry about: The Institute for Women's Policy Research just released a Fact Sheet that shows that while San Francisco's job growth has been affected by the economic downturn, it has matched or exceeded growth in other nearby California counties since passing Paid Sick days in February of 2007. For the full report, visit http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B264_JobGrowth.pdf.

■ **NEW FMLA REGULATIONS: BAD NEWS FOR WORKERS** According to the National Partnership for Women and Families, new US regulations will make it harder for employees to take leave under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA): the new rules give workers and their families less privacy as employers will have more direct access to health information when requesting leave; workers will also have less time to give notice; there will be more documentation required and workers will have a harder time using vacation or other paid time while on leave. For more information: www.nationalpartnership.org

FASCINATING FACTS

■ **FOR THE AVERAGE WOMAN**, joining a union has a much larger effect on her probability of having health insurance than finishing a four-year college degree.

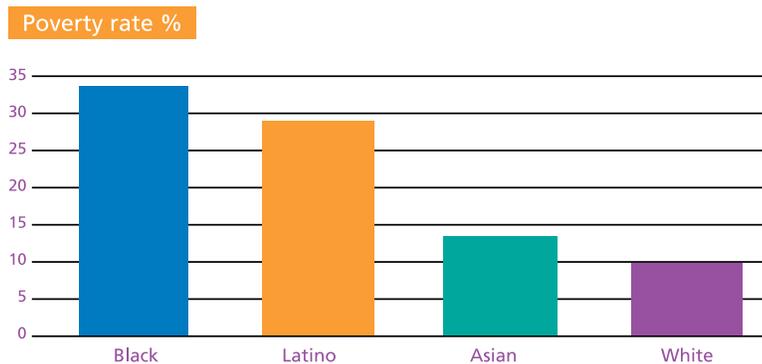
CEPR, Unions and Upward Mobility for Women Workers, December 2008 For more information go to: <http://www.cepr.net>



VITAL STATISTIC

Who are America's Poor Children? The Official Story

Child poverty rates by race/ethnicity, 2007



In America, black and latino children are disproportionately poor

- 34% of black children live in poor families. In the 10 most populated states, rates of child poverty among black children range from 28% in California to 48% in Ohio.
- 29% of Latino children live in poor families. In the 10 most populated states, rates of child poverty among Latino children range from 19% in Florida to 34% in North Carolina.

© National Center for Children in Poverty (www.nccp.org) Who Are America's Poor Children: The Official Story

NETSYNOTE

The Labor Project just won an award from the Family Caregivers Alliance for our policy and advocacy work impacting the lives of people with Alzheimer's Disease. This award has special meaning to me: my grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's at age 59. She soon reverted to speaking only Yiddish, her first language, and by the time she died in a nursing home 12 years later, she no longer recognized anyone and was unable to speak. My mother visited her regularly and fought for some kind of decency in her life, such as making sure she was dressed nicely and treated well. My mother's partner of 15 years was a family friend when I was growing up. His wife, Myra, was one of the sweetest, warmest women I have ever known. Myra was diagnosed with Alzheimer's at age 57 and her husband worked full time and cared for her at home for 5 years until she died.



Advocating for caregivers may be personal for me but it's personal for all of us. Our front page article outlines an ambitious work family agenda for the new administration. We now have a president that not only talks the talk about work family issues, but walks the walk – he took time off one week before the election to visit his dying grandmother in Hawaii. And the day after the election, he attended a parent-teacher conference at his daughter's school. He knows what his priorities are. In these times of economic hardship and struggle, we hear from economists that we should do more and spend more – creating new jobs and stimulating the economy. In the labor movement, we push for better pay, health insurance, and the right to join a union. But we need to create jobs that also allow workers to care for an ailing grandmother, a disabled wife, or a sick child without worrying about being fired or losing a day's pay. The time is now for a real work family agenda.

Labor Project Wins Award

The Labor Project for Working Families was honored with the **Rosalinde Gilbert Innovations in Alzheimer's Disease Caregiving Legacy Award** in recognition of its policy and advocacy efforts around paid leave.

The Caregiving Legacy Awards Program was established through a grant by Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation to the National Center on Caregiving at the Family Caregiver's Alliance (FCA).



For more information on the work of the Family Caregiver's Alliance, go to: www.caregiver.org



MAKING NEWS?

Send ideas, news, and comments to info@working-families.org

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