



LaborFamilyNEWS

PARTNERING WITH UNIONS TO PUT FAMILIES *first* SUMMER 2009

UNIONIZE NOW

For Work Life Balance

BY JENYA CASSIDY

With union membership in decline – down to less than 8 percent in the private sector – union activists across the country are going all out to pass the Employee Free Choice Act. The Employee Free Choice Act would make it easier for workers to join a union by allowing a simple majority sign-up process. The bill’s supporters say this would eliminate many of the obstacles put up by employers, obstacles that currently make unionizing a herculean task.

No one doubts that unions substantially improve the working and living conditions of their members. Compared to non-union workers, especially in comparable jobs, union workers make more money, have more access to pensions, receive better health insurance, and have safer workplaces. But do union workers achieve a better work family balance?

UNIONS HELP CREATE WORK FAMILY BALANCE

A recent report jointly released by the Labor Project for Working Families and the UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education, *Family-Friendly Workplaces: Do Unions Make a Difference?*, reveals that union members are more likely to have and take advantage of family-friendly benefits than their non-union counterparts. The report defines a workplace as ‘family-friendly’ in that it acknowledges its employees’ family responsibilities and creates policies that minimize family job conflicts.

According to the report, union members achieve a better work life balance in part because they have better working conditions across the board. They know their rights and have less fear of retaliation for requesting leave to care for a family member or using flex time. For example,

companies with any unionized employees are almost 2 times more likely to comply with the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) than companies without any unionized employees. And a much larger percentage of union members had heard of the FMLA within two years of it passing than non-union workers.

As the economy worsens, working parents and caregivers are even less likely to take advantage of leave laws or workplace benefits. Heidi Hartmann, President of the Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) in Washington DC, points out that people are working longer hours and not taking time off for fear of getting laid off. “No one wants to stand out as the needy employee right now,” she says. In contrast, union members are less afraid to request leave when they need it or use sick time to care for an ailing child. They know their rights and have recourse through the grievance process when their rights are denied.

EMPLOYEE FREE CHOICE: KEY WORK FAMILY LEGISLATION

An increase in union membership could be the key to making the American workplace more family-friendly. In addition to educating their own members, unions fight for policies that affect all workers. Unions



An increase in union membership could be the key to making the American workplace more family-friendly.

Photo by Communications Workers of America

pushed to pass FMLA and are currently engaged in campaigns to win or expand paid family leave and to make paid sick days a right for all workers.

“The Employee Free Choice Act is a crucial piece of work family legislation,” John Schmitt of Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) said at a recent work family summit. “A 10% increase in unions can change the well-being of working families both in and out of unions because these are the policies that unions are willing to fight for.”

For the full report go to www.working-families.org

Find the INSIDE STORY on...

CARING IN THE TIME OF RECESSION



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CARING IN THE TIME OF RECESSION

Frail Economy Weighs Down Caregivers

BY VIBHUTI MEHRA

Recently, the Orange County Register told the story of Jodee Kalmen, a 54 year old woman who has been caring for her husband Peter Kalmen for four years since he was diagnosed with dementia. Peter's illness cost him his job. The stay-at-home mom became a school bus driver to support her husband and two children. "Besides watching my husband slowly die, I had to live on pins and needles due to the uncertainty of the economy," she told the OC Register. Jodee then lost her job and health insurance. The family savings are gone, the Kalmen home has been refinanced three times and they now survive on Peter's decimated IRA.

This story is not uncommon as the economic downturn causes greater stress and strain on family caregivers.

CAREGIVERS PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN THE ECONOMY

As many as 44 million people (one out of every five households) are caring for an adult/elderly relative or friend in the United States. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) estimates that this unpaid care is worth \$375 billion in annual economic value to the nation. According to a 2008 AARP report, the long-term, in-home care that family caregivers provide to those with chronic illness or disabilities makes them the backbone of the American health care system.



Last summer, we wrote about the financial toll of caregiving and shared the findings of a 2007 report by Evercare and the National Alliance for Caregiving. The report found that more than half of family caregivers were spending on average more than 10 percent of their household income (an average of \$5,531 per year) to meet the out-of-pocket costs of caring for an adult/elderly relative, spouse, disabled sibling or friend.

This year, Evercare and the National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC) released a new report showing that the economic downturn is causing an even greater strain on caregivers who are already dealing with the financial burden of providing care to their family members.

THE RECESSION'S TOLL ON CAREGIVERS

As the risk of unemployment looms large, workers who care for family members are becoming more reluctant to take time away from work for caregiving. One in two working caregivers surveyed by Evercare and NAC said that they were less comfortable taking time off from work to care for their relative or friend. The financial strain of caregiving coupled with the recession is also pushing one-third of caregivers to work more hours or get a second job.

The recession has also taken its toll on the caregivers' employment and earnings status. Forty-three percent of workers who care for family members have had their work hours or pay cut



Caregivers form the backbone of the U.S. economy.

©Family Caregiver Alliance, used with permission. Photo by Megan Krause.

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and one in six have lost their job or been laid off.

Caregivers are also spending more on expenses related to providing care. Many are struggling to pay for basic needs and risking their own financial futures to keep up with the increasing costs. According to the report, almost half of the caregivers who are spending more on caregiving say that they have used all or most of their savings and 43 percent are borrowing money or increasing their credit card debt as a result of the downturn. As many as 63 percent are saving less for retirement.

THE NEED FOR MATERNITY LEAVE

The situation calls for a greater and urgent need to build supportive and family-friendly workplaces. Leeann Anderson, Assistant to the President, United Steelworkers (USW) points out, "As more and more workplaces cut back on staff due to the economic crisis, work demands will increase and balancing work family will become even more difficult. Workers need the protections that work family programs and policies provide in order to keep some measure of sanity in their lives."

Paying attention to the welfare of workers who are coping with caregiving responsibilities during this economic downturn is crucial for the labor movement. "Ensuring the well-being of our union members makes us better and more productive employees," says Alan Lubin, Executive Vice President of the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). For NYSUT, guaranteeing the well-being of its members includes bargaining for family-friendly contract language, creating beneficial programs and advocating for policies that address work family issues.

"Unions have an obligation to address work family issues to ensure workers the dignity they are entitled to."

– Alan Lubin, Executive Vice President of New York State United Teachers

NYSUT BENEFITS CAREGIVERS

In keeping with its mission to improve the social and professional lives of its members and families, NYSUT offers a free social services program to all its members (both in-service and retired) as well as their families. Through the NYSUT Social Services program, union members and their families have access to four full-time social workers. The social workers help NYSUT members who have caregiving responsibilities with a range of services including but not limited to phone consultations and guidance on caregiving, resources and referrals for the aging and disabled, and hospitalization management as needed.

NYSUT members also have free access to the Medicare Rights Center, a national, nonprofit consumer service organization that helps people on Medicare and their caregivers understand their rights and options. Through the NYSUT Social Services program, union members can seek help from the social workers when navigating the complex web of Medicare.

NYSUT's advocacy efforts include working with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) on federal family leave legislation, as well as partnering with statewide coalitions and community based groups on pushing family friendly public policies such as Paid Family Leave in the New York state legislature.

NEED FOR UNIONS GREATER THAN EVER

Unions play a crucial role in an environment where an increasing number of employers are doing away with benefits that caregivers need to

EEOC'S NEW BEST PRACTICES GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

Current laws that prohibit sex, gender, pregnancy, or disability-based discrimination also apply to caregivers. The Federal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) suggests that employers:

- Become aware of statutes and regulations that may impact the treatment of caregivers.
- Recognize that both men and women have caregiving responsibilities.
- Ensure that managers are trained about the organization's policies for caregivers and are in compliance with them.

Employer Best Practices for Workers with Caregiving Responsibilities
www.eoc.gov/policy/docs/caregiver-best-practices.html

[Source: WFC Resources Newsbrief June 2009 & Ethisphere.com]

provide care and stay afloat. "Many of our members do not have any flexibility in their workplaces. This makes the fight for supportive, unionized workplaces even more critical," says Leeann Anderson of USW.

According to Alan Lubin, organized labor has an obligation to help not only existing union members but also our society and future union members. "Work family issues are important to working people and also important for the future union organizing. Our issues are not limited to living wages. Unions have an obligation to address work family issues to ensure workers the dignity that they are entitled to," he says.

To learn more about advocating for work family policies, visit www.working-families.org/policy/index.html or call the Labor Project (510) 643-7088.

UNIONS WIN IT!

WHAT: Sick Leave for Wellness Programs

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 use up to two days of their accumulated sick leave per year to participate in personal health maintenance programs such as weight control, stress management or smoking cessation.

WHAT: Kids in the Workplace

WHERE: New York

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

CWA members employed at Verizon who are parents can benefit from a unique program negotiated by their union. Under the Kids in the Workplace program, a parent can take his/her child (ages 5-13) to work on holidays while the parent works.

WHAT: Educational Trust Fund

WHERE: Colorado

WHO: Denver Federation of Paraprofessionals (DFP), AFT & School District – City and County of Denver

Under a contract agreement with the DFP, the Denver Board of Education has placed \$300,000 in an Educational Trust Fund. Interest earned from the Trust Fund is used to pay tuition costs and related expenses for selected paraprofessionals enrolled in college education classes leading to certification as a teacher.

Looking for examples of good work family contract language?

Register today at www.learnworkfamily.org to use our online work family contract language database.

Have you bargained for new work family contract language lately?

Share stories about your bargaining victories on our online labor education and resource network LEARN WorkFamily www.learnworkfamily.org

*To submit your contract
For more information e-mail
info@working-families.org or
call 510-643-7088.*

NEWS BRIEFS

NEWS WORTHY

■ **NEW JERSEY IS NOW THE SECOND STATE IN THE NATION** where a Paid Family Leave Law allows for paid time off to care for a sick family member or bond with a newborn or newly adopted child. Since January, New Jersey workers have been contributing through payroll deductions to a paid-leave fund. Qualifying workers can take up to six weeks of time off a year at about two-thirds of pay, up to a little over \$540 a week. For more information, visit NJ Time to Care at www.njtimetocare.rutgers.edu.

GLOBAL WORK FAMILY

■ **AUSTRALIAN PARENTS WHO EARN \$150,000 AND UNDER WILL NOW BE ABLE TO TAKE 18 WEEKS OF PAID LEAVE.** WParents will be able to either divide the leave between them or have one parent take it all - \$543 per week, the federal minimum wage. Trade unions helped pass the law but businesses did not oppose it because taxpayers will pay and not individual employers. www.couriermail.com.AU

■ **GERMANY IS MAKING ITS PARENTAL LEAVE MORE FLEXIBLE DURING THE RECESSION:** Now parents can work part-time and spread their leave over a combined 28 months instead of 14. *WFC Resources Newsbrief, June 2009*

UNBELIEVABLE

■ **FACT** The health insurance industry says it is willing to end the practice of charging higher premiums to sick people if all Americans are required to carry insurance. *NY Times, March 25, 2009*

■ **FACT** The Supreme Court ruled for the telecommunications giant AT&T recently in a dispute over how retirement benefits should be calculated for women who took maternity leaves before the Pregnancy Discrimination Act took effect in 1979. Now, the money for those maternity leave weeks is deducted from each retirement check in what dissenting Justices Ruth Bader Ginsberg and Stephen Breyer called “a fresh act of discrimination.” *NY Times, May 18, 2009*

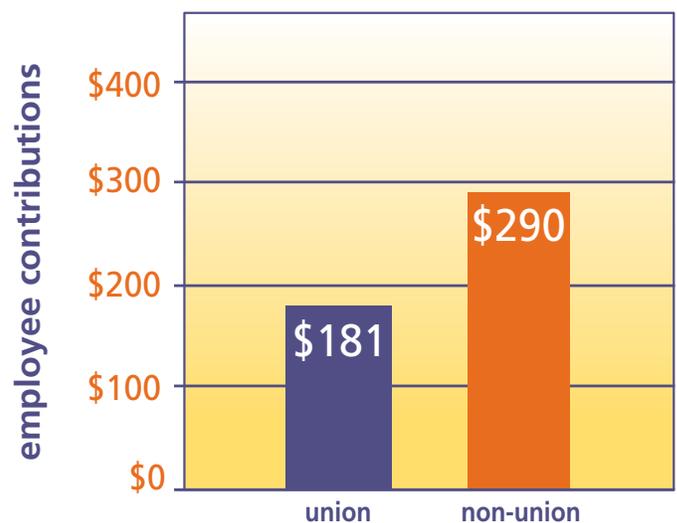


VITAL STATISTIC

Family-Friendly Health Care Benefits: Unions Make a Difference

At the median, private-sector unionized workers are paying 38 percent less for family coverage than private-sector nonunionized workers.

From “Family-Friendly Workplaces: Do Unions Make a Difference?”
For full report, go to www.working-families.org



NETSYNOTE

It takes a village. In this newsletter we list all our Friends and Sponsors to honor and thank you for your support. It's really true that for small organizations like the Labor Project, every little bit counts and makes a huge difference toward making it possible to partner with unions and advocate for working families through organizing, bargaining and policy work.

National and local unions, labor councils and state labor federations support us. But so do lots of individuals. Some of you we know personally and have worked with closely. Many of you we have never met and have supported us for years. Some give \$10 and some give \$1000. Many of you write us notes with your donations to keep up the good work. We love that!

Each donation is important to us because it not only funds our work, but helps us stay connected to the labor and advocacy community through our newsletter, website, emails and our printed materials. We rely on you to spread the word about what's happening on work and family issues such as legislative campaigns, our new online resources and database of innovative work family contract language that unions have successfully negotiated.

I learned a long time ago from my fundraising friends that grassroots fundraising is really about organizing. It allows us to reach out to those of you who are interested in fighting for better work family policies and gives you the opportunity to participate in this struggle by supporting our work. That's what you are doing – helping us win the fight for all workers to have a job and the resources and time to care for the important people in their lives.



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

MAKING NEWS?

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

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