

# NATIONAL REVIEW

## Cato on Paid Family Leave

Ramesh Ponnuru

December 14, 2018

Over the last year, some conservatives and libertarians have suggested that there's a way for the federal government to make it easier for new parents to take time off from work to be with their children while avoiding the drawbacks associated with liberal versions of paid leave. The idea is to allow parents to take a portion of their Social Security benefits early. Senators Joni Ernst, Mike Lee, and Marco Rubio have embraced this idea, as has Representative Ann Wagner. Others on the right object to this idea, and it has been extensively debated. I recently defended the idea from several criticisms made by the *Wall Street Journal*.

This week, scholars at the Cato Institute have taken a new tack in criticizing the idea: pretending it is exactly the same as the liberal proposals even though it was specifically designed to respond to those proposals.

At the Cato blog, Chris Edwards suggests that a new Cato-commissioned poll undermines the idea, which he mischaracterizes as "raiding Social Security." (The proposal gives parents the option of taking some of their benefits early. If that's a "raid," letting people borrow from their 401(k)s was "raiding" them.) The poll, however, never tested whether parents should be allowed to take some of their Social Security benefits early.

On NRO today, Vanessa Brown Calder, also of Cato, performs the same maneuver. Much of her article criticizes the Family Act, the Democrats' version of paid leave, especially for raising the payroll tax. Somehow these criticisms are supposed to discredit the advocacy of Rick Santorum, Ernst, Lee, and Rubio, even though none of them has endorsed the Family Act; none of them has endorsed an increase in the payroll tax; and there are good reasons to think that the other objections Calder raises against the Family Act would either not apply or apply to a much lesser degree to the Republicans' proposal. Naturally, she brings in the same, largely irrelevant, poll results that Edwards does.

As I said, there's a robust debate on the right about the proposal to let parents use some of their Social Security benefits to finance paid leave. Perhaps at some point the scholars at the Cato Institute will actually join that debate.