

Wonkette

You Know What Everyone Loves? Paid Leave!

Robyn Pennacchia

June 7, 2021

What does the United States have in common with Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau and Tonga? Well, it is not that we are a small island nation, that is for sure. No, it's that we're the only countries in the world without sick leave or vacation leave. The United States, Papua New Guinea, Suriname and "a few South Pacific island nations" are the only countries that don't have paid parental leave of any kind.

That is something a large majority of Americans would like to change and have supported changing for some time now, and yet another poll has shown that there is extremely high support for it, including among Republicans.

That poll, commissioned by Paid Leave for All Action, an advocacy group that promotes paid leave policies, surveyed 1,070 likely voters from seven battleground states (Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin). It found that 84 percent of likely voters, including 74 percent of Republicans, support paid leave programs; 69 percent of those polled, including 55 percent of surveyed Republicans, would support a federal leave standard even if they'd have to pay more in taxes to sustain it.

The survey, which was taken from May 14 to 20, had results that are markedly similar to other recent polls on the issue.

For example, a YouGov poll from early April found 82 percent of Americans believe employees should be able to take paid maternity leave, and that 68 percent thought paid maternity and paternity leave ought to be offered.

Even a poll conducted before the pandemic, by the freaking Cato Institute, found that 74 percent of Americans supported paid leave. And 60 percent *still* supported it after being asked if they would continue supporting it if it meant they got smaller pay raises in the future. Even their big gotcha question that made no actual sense whatsoever got majority support. Perhaps they should have gone with something more severe, like "Would you still support paid leave ... if you were then required to give up your firstborn child to Rumpelstiltskin?"

This is something the American people want. The poll also indicated that support for politicians on both sides of the aisle goes significantly up and down depending on whether or not they would support paid leave.

To win a majority of the seven battleground seats up for grabs in 2022, Democrats and Republicans alike will need to appeal to the 20 percent of undecided voters across the states. The poll found that undecided likely voters in the states surveyed lean slightly toward the Republican Party but become willing to support a generic Democrat candidate who supports paid leave by 46 percentage points.

The poll found that voters would currently like to reelect Democratic Sens. Catherine Cortez Masto (NV), Raphael Warnock (GA), and Kyrsten Sinema (AZ) by about 5 points each. But their leads rise by an average of 17 points when linking their work with paid leave efforts.

Voters' support for Republican Sens. Marco Rubio (FL), Richard Burr (NC), Pat Toomey (PA), and Ron Johnson (WI), by contrast, goes down an average of 5 points when each senator's opposition to federal paid leave is highlighted.

See that? Seems like a thing we should probably get on then, no?

President Joe Biden is currently pushing for up to 12 weeks of paid medical or family leave program in his American Family Plan, for things like recovering from a pregnancy, being ill, taking care of a sick loved one, seeking safety from domestic violence or stalking, and bereavement. There are currently no plans to pursue mandated paid vacation time, as every other country on earth has, but that would likely be seen as way too big a step for most Americans. We're doing triage here, and we've gotta take care of what's bleeding first.

One side effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is that it really highlighted some serious issues with the American way of doing things, particularly surrounding healthcare and labor issues, and kind of showed a lot of people that we don't actually *have* to live this way. As much as paid sick leave and family leave enjoyed popular support in the before times, the pandemic made it clearer that it's less a luxury than it an absolute necessity.

"The pandemic completely changed the game," said Dawn Huckelbridge, director of the advocacy group Paid Leave for All. "What had been a hole in our infrastructure, what had been a crisis in the making for years and generations, suddenly now it is out on this really magnified scale. People realize how critical this is to our resilience, to our economic growth, to weathering crises, whether global pandemics or cancer diagnoses."

Part of the reason it's always been hard to get things like paid leave built into our system is the perception that it would make us weak. It's really not *just* money that is the issue for people, it's getting past that fear that these kinds of things would lead to a country full of coddled and lazy wastrels. There's a kind of macho posturing to not just *giving* people healthcare, to having a barely-there social safety net, to not having paid leave. To going to work for ten hours without overtime, even though you're dying of the flu.

All of these things were supposed to make us tough, industrious and morally upright citizens who can weather any storm. It didn't work out that way. We thought we were the Ant, but we turned out to be the Grasshopper. We didn't prepare before, but hopefully now we will.