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Trump's maternity leave plan looks a lot like Bill Clinton's from 1999

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Donald Trump released Tuesday a paid maternity leave plan — the first from a Republican presidential nominee. The measure, a pillar of the real estate mogul's **child-care proposal**, bears close resemblance to an idea floated by Bill Clinton in 1999.

Trump's plan would guarantee **six weeks of paid maternity leave to women**; currently, federal policy provides only 12 weeks of *unpaid* time off. He would fund the change by tweaking the unemployment insurance employers must provide under federal law, according to the campaign. The country's Federal-State Unemployment Insurance supplies benefits to workers who lose their job through no fault of their own. What that means varies by state, but the state-run program generally covers workers who are laid off. Trump's proposal would open the aid to new mothers, who often miss wages as life's expenses surge. Employers would not absorb the burden, Trump aides said, because reductions in the existing program would offset the cost.

Advocates for working families in the late 1990s called a version of this concept baby unemployment insurance, or "**Baby UI**." The first iteration emerged in Vermont, where policymakers saw the legislation as a way to boost working mothers, the breadwinners in a **growing number** of American households. It never passed, but Vermont legislators sought the federal Labor Department's approval in hopes the model would spread nationwide.

At the time, Clinton told former Labor Secretary Alexis Herman to draft regulations allowing states to grant unemployment insurance benefits to new parents. The Labor Department's resulting Baby UI plan, released in 2000, allowed states to fund both maternity and paternity leave for 12 weeks. By 2003, however, the movement chilled. The Bush administration rescinded the policy, insisting it would hurt employers, stifle business and put women at risk of employment discrimination.

Trump's spin on Baby UI would be cheaper than the design Clinton backed. Mothers would be eligible for the new safety-net if their workplace lacked the benefit. Fathers, however, would not qualify. The program would cover half the time Democrats fought for 17 years ago — six weeks instead of 12. Trump said he would eliminate fraud within the program to keep the cost down, the Post's Robert Costa reported, though the Trump campaign did not specify how that would work.

On Tuesday, Trump aides addressed the long-held conservative concerns about using unemployment insurance to fund maternity leave. In a campaign memo shared with The Post,

they said women who intend to have children would not become “less desirable” to employers. The program reductions would pay for the change without raising taxes, staffers said, so hiring a potential mother would not add to a business’s costs.

Economist Heidi Hartmann, president of the nonpartisan Institute for Women’s Policy Research, said the plan would still single out women by extending guaranteed paid leave to only one gender. But she welcomes the conversation, which she said was previously silent on the right.

“It’s great that a Republican candidate for president is indicating support for paid maternity leave,” Hartman said. “It’s also interesting that Trump is proposing half of Bill Clinton’s idea from the year 2000.”

Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, a right-leaning think tank in Washington, D.C., said Trump’s plan isn’t free — it’s a government program expansion, dressed up to look fiscally conservative.

“Someone’s going to pay that cost,” he said. “Arguably it’s the employer. The reality is the costs are always passed on to the employee in one way or another. Ultimately, you’ll have men or women who don’t have children paying for women who do.”

That could mean lost vacation time, Tanner said, or lower wages.

Hillary Clinton has proposed 12 weeks of paid family leave funded through **tax increases on the wealthy**. Trump first mentioned the plight of working families last month in a Detroit speech on the economy, pledging to make childcare tax-free. Both his eldest daughter, 34-year-old Ivanka Trump, and campaign manager, veteran Republican strategist Kellyanne Conway, have **urged him to roll out policy ideas** that support working mothers.

Advocates generally applaud Trump’s focus on working family issues — with caveats.

“It’s great to see candidates addressing the need for paid leave, given that the U.S. is at the very bottom of the world’s nations when it comes to affordable time to care,” Ellen Bravo, executive director of Family Values @ Work, said in a statement. “But we need to remember that it’s not just pregnant women who welcome new children. Fathers and adoptive parents need time as well.”