

# NATIONAL REVIEW

## Paid Family Leave and the Right

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I have been pretty skeptical of proposed government policies to promote paid family leave. But a recent proposal from Kristin Shapiro, a fellow at the Independent Women's Forum, struck me as superior to previous proposals and worth considering. Her idea is to let new parents borrow from their future Social Security benefits. They could replace a portion of their wages for twelve weeks of leave, and in return delay taking Social Security benefits for a comparable period. (The calculations are being refined, but I gather that to make the numbers balance twelve weeks of leave would probably have to mean twelve weeks of delay.)

The more I've followed the debate, the more I've supported the idea. That debate continues, especially among conservatives and libertarians. Michael Strain and I argued about it in *Bloomberg View* recently, and Vanessa Brown Calder took up the case against it at Cato's blog yesterday. The *New York Times* covered the debate this week, too.

The *Times* article mentions that many conservatives and libertarians have sought to convert, or partly convert, Social Security into a system of personal accounts. One thought that crossed my mind while reading it is that there are certain similarities between the personal-account and paid-leave ideas that ought to reduce conservative skepticism of the latter.

It never occurred to most people on the Right to object to personal accounts as a "new entitlement." They understood that the accounts wouldn't increase spending over the long run and simply added a new option to an existing entitlement. They didn't reject the accounts because they would shift costs from the future and therefore require transitional financing. (Instead of paying Social Security checks to future retirees, the government would have to come up with cash to seed their accounts.) And they didn't object to personal accounts on the theory that politicians would inevitably up-end the fiscal balance of the deal by just giving everyone the accounts and their full Social Security benefits too.

Yet we're hearing the analogue of each objection to the paid-leave idea. Its opponents on the Right are calling it a new entitlement, treating its (much smaller) effect on the medium-term

fiscal balance as a deal-breaker, and devising implausibly pessimistic political scenarios about its future.

Maybe conservatives and libertarians have been too optimistic about personal accounts in the past, and those on the right who object to using Social Security to help parents take time off from work are seeing this issue more clearly. But I think it's more likely that there's a mental block that's keeping the paid-leave objectors from seeing how much these debates have in common.