INTRODUCING THE ''FAMILY LEAVE INSURANCE ACT OF 2008''

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

Mr. STARK. Madam Speaker, I rise today with Representatives GEORGE MILLER, LYNN WOOLSEY, and CAROLYN MALONEY to introduce a bill that will bring our Nation up to date with the rest of the world. One hundred and sixty-nine countries guarantee some form of paid family leave. The U.S. is part of an illustrious four-member club of nations—including Liberia, Papua New Guinea, and Swaziland—that fail to provide security for new parents or those caring for a loved one. The ''Family Leave Insurance Act'' will guarantee that workers will no longer have to choose between their jobs and their families.

Since becoming law 15 years ago, the landmark Family and Medical Leave Act, FMLA, has provided job protection and guaranteed leave for millions of workers. Unfortunately, the FMLA is limited to workers employed by large employers—only 45 percent of the private sector workforce—and, because the leave is unpaid, lower income workers can seldom afford to take it. Recent studies have found that 78 percent of FMLA eligible workers who wanted to take leave did not do so because they could not afford it. At a time of recession and tightening family budgets, this predicament is only getting worse.

A few years ago, my home State of California enacted the first paid family leave law in the country. The law has proven to be wildly popular. Despite the protests of business groups at the time the law was passed, most employers have come to embrace the law and realize that it facilitates continuity, productivity, and job satisfaction. Paid leave helps workers to strike a balance between work and family. Such a balance has real benefits for children. A Harvard School of Public Health study found that the education and health of children improves substantially when parents have work flexibility and paid leave. When parents are able to act as caregivers for a sick child, hospital stays are reduced by 31 percent. Parental involvement is also associated with higher achievement in language and math, improved behavior, and lower dropout rates.

The ''Family Leave Insurance Act'' takes the next logical and necessary step by implementing a comprehensive paid leave program that will cover all workers. The middle class is getting squeezed: hours are longer, job security is lower, and families have less time together. A report by the President's Council of Economic Advisers found that between 1969 and 1999 children lost 22 hours per week with their parents. Workers and their families need greater flexibility and support. Yet, according to the Department of Labor, only 8 percent of private employers provide paid leave. Clearly, there is room for improvement. This bill will:

Provide all workers with 12 weeks of paid leave over a 12-month period to care for a new child, provide for an ill family member, treat their own illness, or deal with an exigency caused by the deployment of a member of the military;

Provide these benefits through a new trust fund that is financed equally by employers and employees, who will each contribute 0.2 percent of the employee's pay;

Progressively tier the benefits so that a low-wage worker (earning less than $30,000) will receive full or near full salary replacement, middle-income workers ($30,000–$60,000) receive 55 percent wage replacement, and higher earners (over $60,000) receive 40–45 percent, with the benefit capped at approximately $800 per week;

Administer the program through the Department of Labor which will contract with states to administer the program (similar to how the Unemployment Insurance program is run);

Allow states and businesses with materially equivalent or better benefits to opt-out of the program.

The ''Family Leave Insurance Act'' is endorsed by the National Partnership for Women and Families, the AFL–CIO, the California Labor Federation, Voices for America's Children, First Focus, and the National Employment Law Project.

Members of Congress are constantly talking about family values. Let's go beyond talk and take action that families will actually value. I urge my colleagues to cosponsor the ''Family Leave Insurance Act.'' We can strengthen families, make business more competitive, and create a better future for our country. The time to act is now.

IN RECOGNITION OF GLORIA K. BELL ON HER RETIREMENT

HON. JAMES T. WALSH

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

Mr. WALSH of New York. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize Ms. Gloria K. Bell.

Saturday, March 29, marked the retirement of Gloria K. Bell, a dedicated employee of the Department of Health and Human Services, HHS. Ms. Bell's Federal service spans 40 plus years, and her retirement provides a golden opportunity to reflect upon her service to her agency and to Capitol Hill as a liaison between HHS and congressional staffs.

Gloria Bell entered public service while working on her bachelors of science degree at American University in Washington, DC. Upon graduation, she joined HHS as a program analyst in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation where her portfolio included the Head Start and Developmental Disabilities programs.

In January 1987, Gloria continued her illustrious career at HHS in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Resources and Technology, Office of Budget, as a budget analyst. For over 20 years since, she has worked tirelessly through all phases of the process to develop and present the Department's budget and has progressed to an effective team leader in the office. She managed one of the largest budget databases in the Department, consisting of over 1,300 programs, project activities, and historical budget numbers from FY 1981 through FY 2005. Gloria also created a database that is used to produce the current All Purpose Tables, APTs. She wrote the operations manual and trained other staff in the APT system's operation.

Along with the budget and APT databases, Gloria's legacy encompasses years of service as the Budget Office's Congressional Liaison, ensuring that the myriad Senate and House reports requested of HHS are responsive, complete, and received on Capitol Hill in a timely manner. Through the years, Gloria's industrious service has been commended by 20 Excellent Performance, 9 Outstanding Performance, 4 Special Act of Service, and 2 Employee of the Month Awards.

I ask that you join me in applauding Gloria Bell as she closes a chapter on many years of excellent service to her agency and the Federal Government.

RECOGNIZING NICOLE GAITHER

HON. KENNY MARCHANT

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

Mr. MARCHANT. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize Nicole Gaither on achieving the Girl Scout Gold Award. Receiving the Gold Award is a testament to Miss Gaither's leadership, citizenship, and service to her community.

For her Gold Award project, Nicole Gaither developed an outdoor volunteer program for children ages 11–14 called Outdoor Action Kids. O.A.K.S. provides children the opportunity to perform basic outdoor conservation tasks while helping the staff and adult volunteers maintain Bob Jones Nature Center, a 76-acre park. Miss Gaither developed a coordinator's manual, application, training manual, and training video to ensure her program will continue well into the future.

The Girl Scouts of America promotes a positive influence for young women of today. I am honored to represent Nicole Gaither in earning the highest award bestowed in Girl Scouts. I commend her commitment and dedication for the betterment of her life, her community, and her country.

HONORING THOMAS EDWARD PRICE

HON. SAM GRAVES

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

Mr. GRAVES. Madam Speaker, I proudly pause to recognize Thomas Edward Price of Kearney, Missouri. Thomas is a very special young man who has exemplified the finest qualities of citizenship and leadership by taking an active part in the Boy Scouts of America, Troop 397, and earning the most prestigious award of Eagle Scout.

Thomas has been very active with his troop, participating in many scout activities. Over the many years Thomas has been involved with scouting, he has not only earned numerous merit badges, but also the respect of his family, peers, and community.

Madam Speaker, I proudly ask you to join me in commending Thomas Edward Price for his accomplishments with the Boy Scouts of America and for his efforts put forth in achieving the highest distinction of Eagle Scout.