

Today we find an increasing number of women in the work force. They now constitute somewhere like 44 percent of our work force are women and a percent of the women that are in the work force is about 61 percent of our women who are of the age that could be the work force, are working. And if you count the women with children under the age of 18, 67 plus percent are in the work force. So when we once had a situation where the women in our society were able to stay home and care for the children of the family, that is no longer the case. In addition the women in our society also cared for our elderly, our parents, our grandparents when they were sick and because they are now in the work force it's a difficult thing for them to do. So as our society has changed, as our families have changed, as our work force has changed, our public policy needs to change. It is time to recognize what has happened and make adjustments in our public policy. What we need to do is adopt a minimum standard in the area of family leave and this is definitely what I would consider a minimum standard. Six weeks of unpaid leave over a two-year period predicated on the number of conditions is not unreasonable in my view. The proposal at the federal level is for 12 weeks of leave and, of course, there are many companies that have family leave policies that are paid and substantially greater benefit than what we're proposing here. But as a first step to identify the need to have a base on which to build, I believe this is a reasonable step forward. Now we've done something similar like this when we have taken steps to establish a minimum wage. We've taken similar steps forward when we talked about child labor and not allowing children in sweat shops any longer. We took a step forward when we talked about safety, the OSHA regulations to protect our workers from harm. Setting minimum standards in certain areas have been a commonplace occurrence and I know there is great resistance to this by the business community. The private sector is very, very concerned about this legislation and have worked very hard to oppose it, but I think you can also see the great demand and desire to see this legislation pass by looking at the list of coalition members that are in support of this. You'll find religious organizations, you'll find retired individuals who are very much affected, those groups representing our elderly, those groups representing our young, those groups representing our working people, the FL-CIO very strongly in support of this. Again, the religious organizations have been there. Different groups representing disabled individuals have all recognized the impacts of society's changes on the family and on these individuals and though I recognize the concern of the business