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Abstract

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) became embroiled in partisan politics. The FMLA was available to most workers, but its impact was severely diluted the day it was signed into law. Coverage. The resulting bill offered less support to working parents than leave policies in most other countries. The article opens with a description of problematic features of the bill that derive from partisan politics and then places the drafting of the bill in historical context. The story of the bill's passage is then discussed, highlighting the role of parties and interest groups, especially business organizations. The article concludes by providing a larger analysis of the leave debate.



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1.
 1. The connections between the Parental and Disability Leave Act and other proposals for parental leave (e.g., Hewlett et al., 1986; Kamerman et al., 1983; Zigler & Frank, 1988) are indirect. The drafters of the FMLA, although intending to meet the needs of working families, were actually trying to address gender inequities pertaining to the earlier Pregnancy Discrimination Act (e.g., Radigan, 1988; Vogel, 1993).
 2. According to Clymer (1992b), Congressional Democrats were more likely to oppose the FMLA when they represented districts, especially small, southern towns, where business hostility was strong.

According to Wilson (1981), the Chamber was often able to get members of both parties to go along with its agenda because so many constituents depended on small businesses for jobs.

3.

3. The House Post Office and Civil Service Committee passed the bill at the same time as the Education and Labor Committee, but with much less controversy. According to Radigan (1988, p. 22), the Post Office Committee sees the federal government as a model employer and members of both parties on the committee are open to innovation.

4.

4. The Democrats won in 1992 primarily because of more general economic issues (Cook, 1992; Dye, 1995), not because of their position on family leave.

5.

5. Many of the workers covered by the FMLA who were already entitled to private leaves received some wage replacement from their employers (Meisenheimer, 1989, p.22; Trzcinski, 1991, pp. 221-222).

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