

# These candidates are out of touch <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

As 2015 comes to a close, eight debates have given us an opportunity to learn where the top-tier candidates on both sides of the aisle stand on the economic issues that matter most to working families — child care, minimum wage, equal pay and paid family leave. We got useful insights into which candidates support working families — and which ones are ignoring them.

Child care, one of the biggest issues facing Americans today, has received almost no attention. The first five years of a child's life are critical for learning social and emotional skills, as well as for setting them up to be good students and citizens later in life. Once children start school, they often need to attend after-school programs while their parents work. Wondering how to afford safe educational environments for our kids keeps parents up at night.

According to our recent polling, affordable child care is one of the key issues voters say would sway them to vote for a candidate. Yet, it has only come up three times during the debates — once when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton mentioned her support for early childhood education in an answer (before being cut off by the moderator), once when Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders talked about how his wife, as first lady, could help him address the dysfunctional child care system in the U.S., and once when Florida Senator Marco Rubio was asked about his child tax credit plan.

Rubio said that in many states child care costs more than college, and families don't know how they will make their payments every month, let alone save for college. Yet his \$2,500 child tax plan is a drop in the bucket compared to the more than \$12,000 a year families pay for care for their four-year olds in some states. And it does nothing to support the people who care for our little ones, who are paid, on average, \$10.30 an hour. Even Rubio has acknowledged that \$10 an hour is not enough to live on.

Child care should be a huge issue for the presidential candidates.

Another issue that would impact the economic security of women and families (and their votes) is the minimum wage. One of the clearest distinctions to come out of the presidential debates has been the Democratic candidates' support for, and the Republican candidates' opposition to, raising the federal minimum wage. The current federal minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour. Raising it would disproportionately benefit women, who are two-thirds of the country's minimum wage earners, and would help millions of families make ends meet.

Sanders and Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley support an increase to \$15 per hour and Clinton supports an increase to \$12 per hour nationally, as well as \$15 per hour in certain areas. Meanwhile, the debates revealed that Donald Trump, Ben Carson and Rubio are strongly opposed to a minimum wage increase. With women currently paid on average 79 cents for every dollar paid to men, a minimum wage increase is a big deal not just for helping families stay afloat, but also for getting closer to equal pay for women and men.

Consistent with their support for an increase in the federal minimum wage, Sanders and Clinton have been proactive about their support for equal pay for equal work, and Clinton has specifically called for pay transparency and the Paycheck Fairness Act. These policies help address the fact that if women don't know they are being paid differently, it's impossible to fix the problem. Yet, on the GOP side, Texas Senator Ted Cruz and former Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina avoided answering a question about the problem of unequal pay, pivoting instead to a conversation about single moms and rising poverty among women (yet without saying what they would do about it).

On paid family and medical leave, all three Democratic candidates used the debates to express their strong support for it, noting that the United States is one of the only nations in the world without it. In states that have adopted a paid family and medical leave policy, employers and employees alike report benefiting from it. Yet, the Republican debates have been silent on the issue.

In fact, the Republican debates have largely ignored all of the issues that would truly support working families — and only revealed how out of touch the candidates are with the realities of today's workforce. As just one example, take the final Republican debate of the year, when New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, ostensibly one of the most moderate candidates of the batch, talked about about moms dropping off kids at the bus stop while dads went to work. As we end 2015, moms are actually breadwinners in two-thirds of families in the United States. Candidates with outdated views like Christie's share a lack of vision for updating our workplace rules to match today's realities.

In 2016, candidates have the opportunity to get even more specific about what they will do to make sure no one has to choose between being there for family and earning a living. Instead of using hate and fear-based rhetoric that stokes anxiety and unrest, candidates should focus on how they will improve the quality of life for the millions of working families in the U.S. The best way to do this: share their visions for national economic solutions that will help us all, together, make it work.

-reprinted from CNBC

**Region:** United States <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** pay equity <sup>[4]</sup>

women's labour force participation <sup>[5]</sup>

federal election <sup>[6]</sup>

cash benefits <sup>[7]</sup>

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