

Trump's child care plan only works if you're rich ^[1]

Author: Labaton, Vivien

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EXCERPTS

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump just released more details about his proposal to make child care affordable for working families. Spoiler alert: It still benefits wealthier families most and leaves behind the working families who are struggling to make ends meet.

By now it's become clear that anytime Trump is looking to woo women voters, he trots out his daughter to be his proxy. And for good reason – after years of misogynistic remarks and behavior, women know that Donald Trump is not their champion. Ivanka, on the other hand, represents a certain reality about today's workforce, namely that women work outside the home and continue to do so even after becoming moms.

But as the daughter of a so-called billionaire, Ivanka does not represent the majority of working parents. And so it should be no surprise that Trump's child care plan, of which she is apparently an architect, benefits people closer to her end of the income spectrum. Though distinctly more coherent compared to Trump's other proposals (no doubt a hallmark of Ivanka's involvement), contrary to Trump's assertions, this plan will not bring the cost of child care within reach for most working families.

Trump's plan is built on tax deductions, which is problematic for three reasons. First, you cannot deduct something you cannot pay for to begin with. For the typical working family, child care costs \$10,000 to \$20,000 a year, which can amount to nearly 30 percent of a family's income in the United States.

And tax deductions do nothing for the 44 percent of families that don't earn enough to pay income taxes. Trump's solution for accommodating these lower-income families is to offer a rebate of \$1,200 per year. With average child care expenses exceeding the cost of rent and college tuition in most states, this rebate will barely make a dent in most families' child care bills.

Second, most families have to pay their child care provider weekly or monthly, so an end-of-year tax break is no help. Trump's child care plan assumes parents can pay thousands of dollars up-front each month to even qualify for his deduction, and then wait up to a year to get reimbursed. When you're struggling every week to make ends meet, an end-of-year deduction or rebate is too little too late.

Finally, wholly absent from Trump's child care plan is support for the child care workforce. The very people who love and care for our children are paid a median hourly wage of just \$9.77. As a point of comparison, we pay people more to park our cars than we do to care for our children.

So it should come as no surprise that nearly half of child care workers—many of whom are parents themselves—need food stamps, welfare payments and Medicaid to survive. What a terrible irony that the people who care for our children cannot afford care for their own. Trump does nothing to guarantee a living wage for the people who make it possible for all other working parents to earn a living.

It's true that Trump's plan does go further than most Republicans have dared go on the matter of paid family leave (though that's admittedly a pretty low bar). His plan would guarantee six weeks of paid maternity leave. First, let's note that not all parents are women. He seems to have left out a significant portion of the population who want and deserve parental leave.

Granted, for someone who has claimed it's a woman's job to care for the kids, it may not seem like a big deal to exclude fathers and other caregiving needs from his paid leave proposal. But it's 2016—and Trump is apparently out of touch with what modern families and the modern workforce look like today, when women are primary or co-breadwinners in almost two-thirds of all households. If Trump really wants to support working moms, he should also give dads paid time off to care for their kids.

As important, any parent of a newborn can tell you that six weeks just doesn't cut it. You're still figuring out your baby's sleep and feeding schedules (assuming they have one by that point, in which case you're pretty lucky), you are likely extremely sleep-deprived, and if you're the one who gave birth, your body is still recovering. Admittedly, someone who has boasted of never changing a diaper and who has called a breastfeeding woman "disgusting" is not likely to know any of this, so perhaps to him six weeks sounds like enough.

His paid leave plan also neglects the care giving needs of our seniors. With a Baby Boomer turning 65 every eight seconds in the U.S., we need to ensure family members can take time off to care for aging or ailing loved ones, which is why we need a paid family and medical leave program, not just a maternity leave program.

If there is a bright spot in Trump's plan it is this: the mere fact that he has put forward a proposal, however flawed, to make child care affordable and guarantee maternity leave, is recognition of the urgency and demand from voters for policies that don't force them to choose between a paycheck and their families. That's a step in the right direction. But if the policy itself doesn't actually help the families that need it most, we're no better off.

If Trump wants to get serious about supporting working women and their families, he must do three things: first, ensure that no family pays more than 10 percent of their income on high-quality care; second, guarantee that child care providers earn at least \$15/hour so that they can support their own families too; and third, guarantee at least 12 weeks of paid family leave for parents and people caring for their aging or ailing family members.

If Trump talked to more working parents besides his daughter Ivanka, he might know that.

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