

**Families and Work Institute's Corporate Leadership Circle
Notes from Conference Calls with the Chief Policy Advisors from the
Obama and McCain Presidential Campaigns
October 2008**

Families and Work Institute's **Corporate Leadership Circle** was pleased to bring the senior policy advisors to Senator Obama's and Senator McCain's campaigns to representatives of our corporate and community networks by telephone on September 16th and September 24th, 2008, respectively. [Karen Kornbluh](#), representing Senator Obama and [Wendy Grubbs](#), [Jay Khosla](#) and [John Bash](#) representing Senator McCain were asked an identical set of questions selected from those submitted to Families and Work Institute by members of the Corporate Leadership Circle. These one-hour calls were moderated by [Ellen Galinsky](#), President and Co-Founder of Families and Work Institute.

The questions and corresponding answers from both Presidential candidates' advisors are summarized below. Please go to:

<http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/>

<http://www.barackobama.com/issues/>

for the official platforms on work life and related issues and please read Ellen Galinsky's background call to action: [Work Life: Moving from the Personal to the Political](#)

These notes have been reviewed by the speaker on the call before they were released.

ELLEN GALINSKY (EG): This call represents the first call with the Presidential candidates' policy advisors on taking the "personal to the political" on work life issues. The 2008 election has raised the issues of working families - which have been sleeper political issues - to the fore and given huge attention to how the individual candidates for President and Vice President are managing their own personal and professional lives. We believe that now is the time, and we believe the candidates agree, to move the discussion to the candidates' stands on work life policies.

It's my great pleasure today to begin the call by introducing Karen Kornbluh, who is going to represent the Obama campaign. Karen is the Policy Director in the Office of US Senator Barack Obama.

How important a political issue is work and family life to the candidate?

What are the issues he feels are most important to address?

KAREN KORNBLUH (KK): Senator Obama has an incredible commitment to these issues. He was inspired by his own single mother [who worked, went to school, and raised children] as well as his grandmother who worked [her way up from being a secretary to being a bank vice president.] [In addition he and his wife also have to balance their own family with their careers.] In Illinois he has expanded children's health care, [Earned Income Tax Credit \(EITC\)](#) and led the effort to create the [Illinois Early Learning Council](#). Senator Obama devoted a whole chapter of his book, *The Audacity of Hope*, to the issue of work and family. Rather than see [these issues] as subordinate, he chooses to deal with work family issues as mainstream economic and social policy issues. Obama's program is a cumulative effort and doesn't see any one issue as a "silver bullet".

**Families and Work Institute's Corporate Leadership Circle
Notes from Conference Calls with the Chief Policy Advisors from the
Obama and McCain Presidential Campaigns
October 2008**

One of the most important issues to work family issues is health care. Barack Obama has a proposal to make comprehensive, affordable health care available to all. You would have health care whether or not your employer offers it, which gives people incredible flexibility.

For the average family who already has health care it would save them \$2500 per year. This is one of Barack Obama's top priorities.

Barack Obama also has a very robust 0-5 policy (a policy on the first five years of life). Working parents can know their young children are not only somewhere safe, but also learning.

Senator Obama also would sign a law giving everyone the ability to earn seven paid sick days.

EG: Workplace flexibility—including flexibility in the scheduling of when and where and how much time employees work over their careers—is gaining increasing attention from employers because it helps them recruit and retain the best talent, addresses fuel cost and environmental concerns, facilitates employment for the disabled, and is an advantage in times of a natural disasters or other crises. In addition, workplace flexibility helps employees manage their work and family lives.

What is the candidates' position on workplace flexibility? What are the roles of the government and employers?

KK: [This is] definitely something we'll all want to work on together – government and business. This is a harder issue for lower-wage workers as they lack leverage with their employers. We hope to create a program to work with businesses and educate them on the advantages of working on best practice models – this has previously been tried in the United Kingdom (UK) - increase federal incentives for telecommuting, and make the Federal Government a model employer in part by adopting flexible work schedules.

Senator Obama endorsed Senator Kennedy's proposal - based on the UK one - allowing employees to petition their employers to discuss a flexible work arrangement. This ability to make formal requests by an employee would require a reply from their employer. Decisions would have to be made on whether it would negatively affect the company/customer or not. We would hope to use the presidential bully pulpit to keep the flexibility issue moving forward.

EG: A number of the company representatives listening in on the call today wrote in that the US is one of the few countries without paid leave. What is your candidate's position on Family Leave?

Should the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) be changed? In what ways?

Should it be paid? By whom?

KK: At this time the US does not have paid leave. We are recommending a two-part change:

1. Expand the [Family and Medical Leave Act](#) to cover businesses with 25 or more employees (currently it's 50) as well as [to provide coverage for] additional purposes including allowing workers to take leave for elder care needs; allowing parents up to 24 hours of leave each year to participate in their children's academic activities at

**Families and Work Institute's Corporate Leadership Circle
Notes from Conference Calls with the Chief Policy Advisors from the
Obama and McCain Presidential Campaigns
October 2008**

school; allowing leave to be taken for purposes of caring for individuals who reside in their home for six months or more; and expanding FMLA to cover leave for employees to address domestic violence and sexual assault. People could not be fired for dealing with these essential life issues.

2. Expand FMLA [to provide] paid leave. Encourage each state to adopt a paid leave system. Provide \$1.5 billion fund to get it started as well as offset the cost to employees and employers. We already have some similar programs in California. ([California's Paid Family Leave Insurance Program](#))

EG: What about the issue of the bureaucracy surrounding FMLA for companies?

KK: The current Department of Labor is proposing changes to the FMLA because it claims there are problems with the implementation – but my understanding is that this is not based on a real study of how FMLA is working and could make it more difficult for employees to exercise their rights under the law.

EG: What is your candidate's position on Sick Leave?

For how many days per year?

Should it be paid? By whom?

Whom should it cover? The employee only? Sick children? Parents? Spouse? Partners?

KK: The Senator would require employers to provide seven paid sick days a year for employees in the event of their own illness or that of a family member. Legislation is currently being discussed in Congress. The discrepancy between higher and lower paid workers makes the need for a blanket policy more important as we have already said that lower paid workers have less leverage.

EG: Increasingly employees want more flexible careers. How would your candidate help new parents take longer leaves to care for children, assist employees in taking leaves to care for the ill or elderly or to go back to school for more education/training or help employees phase into retirement?

KK: This is something that we should pay attention to. People want to fulfill their responsibilities at work and at home. They want to get back to work using their skills after they have taken time out of the workplace and to phase into retirement. Rather than make it harder for them to have flexible careers, government and business should do what they can to make this easier. Government should expand family and medical leave and also create a way for people to have paid family and medical leave. In addition, people need to know that even if they go to a flexible job they will have health care - many [people] stick with full-time work careers versus contract-based, part-time, or other work arrangements only because they will lose their health care otherwise. And government can help [in] retirement saving when employers don't create a pension plan. In addition, the government can encourage telecommuting and can help educate businesses about best practices in giving employees flexible work schedules and flexible careers.

**Families and Work Institute's Corporate Leadership Circle
Notes from Conference Calls with the Chief Policy Advisors from the
Obama and McCain Presidential Campaigns
October 2008**

EG: There has been a decline in the ambition of employees over the past 15 years—fewer employees want jobs with more responsibility, according to Families and Work Institute (FWI) data, especially because many feel they already have too much to do. How would the candidate address issues of overwork? Of the time famine that so many employees experience?

KK: One of the reasons people are busier is that they are working harder to make up for the fact that their income isn't rising the way it used to. Barack Obama will invest to grow the economy so that we can have high wage jobs. Right now people are working too many hours just to stay even, so flexibility is an important issue to [address] this.

EG: How does your candidate plan to address the impact of the gas crisis on commuting employees?

A number of companies have mentioned the issues of tax incentives for companies establishing regional hubs to lower employee gas cost, reduce carbon footprint and lessen dependence on foreign fuel- and hope you will consider that.

Other companies have mentioned problems they have related to telecommuters who live/work in one state but whose offices are in another state being subject to double income tax. They have also said that telecommuting can open the corporation up to increased taxes and hope that your candidate will address this.

KK: Barack Obama has proposed an energy rebate to give people immediate relief from rising gas prices as well as investing in infrastructure - light rail, mass transit. Over the long term we need to invest in different kinds of renewable energy. We can encourage telecommuting by investing in a better broadband system. We'll continue to look for barriers to telecommuting and try to address them.

EG: The cost of American health care is affecting US companies. In 2008, 34% of employers required employees to pay a larger share of their own and their families' health insurance. In addition, we have seen the costs of health care leading to cutbacks in funding pensions and disability leave. We know that the issue of health care could take up all of the time of our call and don't want to do this because it is addressed in other debates. But our companies have asked how can work life issues help address the spiraling cost of health care?

KK: The US pays more than other countries for health care, but doesn't necessarily get better results. We're not getting more wellness and we're not getting a higher life expectancy. [With] Senator Obama's health care reform, if you have health insurance that you like you can stick with it, but you will pay less. If you don't [have health insurance] you can buy into a system that is like [\[the one\] members of Congress get](#). We need to change the way insurance companies do business. Increase the incentives for them to provide preventive care, deal with chronic illness in a holistic way, use digital records and provide a medical "home" for patients so they are not sent from specialist to specialist. This would necessitate an increase in research to find out what is cost effective and in information technology.

EG: What role do you see for work-life professionals in promoting wellness?

**Families and Work Institute's Corporate Leadership Circle
Notes from Conference Calls with the Chief Policy Advisors from the
Obama and McCain Presidential Campaigns
October 2008**

KK: Overwork is leading to the chronic problems we are dealing with today. People have more stress; they don't have time to cook dinner; they don't have time to exercise. Surely, if we have better work life balance that will help promote wellness.

EG: What is your candidate's position on education and care for the first three years of life for those families who need and want to work- and on universal pre-K?

KK: Barack Obama has a comprehensive 0-5 plan. He plans to:

- invest in early learning challenge grants to help fund state 0-5 efforts and help states move toward voluntary, universal pre-school;
- quadruple the number of children eligible for [Early Head Start](#), increase Head Start funding and improve quality for both;
- increase [Child Care Development Block Grant](#) money;
- create a Presidential Early Learning Council to encourage early learning collaboration;
- [look at the] [Child and Dependant Care tax credit](#) [which is] woefully inadequate and not available to low-income families- and reform it by making it refundable and allow low-income families to receive up to a 50% credit on their child care expenses; and
- expand programs such as the [Nurse-Family Partnership](#), which provides home visits by trained nurses to low-income first-time mothers.

EG: What proposals do you have for after-school care?

KK: [Senator Obama] would double funding for the [21st Century Community Learning Centers](#) program - it could serve a million more children - as well as increase its quality.

EG: Another area of concern is the exploding costs for elder care and need for services. What if anything, does either party plan to do to support the 45% of employees taking care of our growing elderly population?

KK: The Family and Medical Leave Act would help. In addition, Barack Obama will take steps to ensure that our seniors have meaningful long-term care options that are consistent with their individual needs, including the option of home care. He will safeguard Social Security. And he will develop new retirement plans and pension protections that will give Americans a secure, portable way to save for retirement.

EG: What would Senator Obama do to help the low-wage working family? For instance, how would your candidate address narrowing the gap between men and women's pay?

KK: We've got to bring women's pay up. Low pay is hurting their children and their families. Senator Obama would pass the [Ledbetter Act](#) which will make it easier to combat pay discrimination, the [Fair Pay Act](#), and modernize the [Equal Pay Act](#). He would also raise the minimum wage, and peg it to inflation; increase the number of working parents eligible for [EITC](#); increase the benefits available to parents who support their children through child support payments; increase benefits for families with three or more children; and also review the [EITC](#)

**Families and Work Institute's Corporate Leadership Circle
Notes from Conference Calls with the Chief Policy Advisors from the
Obama and McCain Presidential Campaigns
October 2008**

[marriage penalty](#). We would also try to battle caregiver discrimination - people with children who are discriminated against in terms of pay, benefits and employment opportunities.

EG: What about government bureaucracy as a barrier to accessing government funds? FWI has a project we are funding across the country to help low-wage employees access government benefits with the assistance of their employers and we, like many others, find that employees don't access these benefits because of bureaucratic barriers.

KK: It is unfortunate when in order to gain access to government services, people must spend hours away from their job and their children to wait in offices, stand in line or remain on hold. It is even worse when inefficient government means that families are denied the services they are eligible for. This is not an issue that can be fixed overnight – especially when the problem is at the state or local level – but it is an important component of putting government back on the side of families.

EG: What about the aging workforce? What is your approach?

KK: Social Security is important and keeps many older Americans out of poverty. Help would come in the form of eliminating taxes on seniors who earn under \$50,000 a year. Senator Obama would also help to engage seniors in quality volunteer opportunities. We need to take a look at modern retirement policies.

EG: Many of us watched the Columbia University forum on Community Service with Senator Obama and Senator McCain on 9/11. In closing, are there any special proposals to link working people or the aging workforce to community service?

KK: Barack Obama has a robust service plan. He has said, "I am not just asking for your vote, I am asking for engaged citizenship." This means the elderly, as well as youth. There are plans to expand the Peace Corp in addition to other programs including the [Experience Corp](#), which already exists, to help seniors get involved in meaningful volunteer opportunities.

EG: What of the role of individual versus the government versus business in addressing work life issues? This is a very difficult time economically. How are you planning to pay for some of these initiatives?

KK: There are some things where the Government can set a standard, such as sick days. In some cases, the States will get assistance from the Federal Government to set something up that will help companies within that State, such as paid leave. We are in a tough time economically so we don't want to do anything that is ineffective or inefficient or that would actually hurt employers. Government bureaucracy needs to be changed, but in some cases it will be a conversation [about] cultural norms. People don't want a hand out but they do want a government that is on their side.

EG: Thank you so much, Karen, for addressing our audience today.

Families and Work Institute (FWI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization that studies the changing workforce, family and community. As a preeminent think-tank, FWI is known for being ahead of the curve, identifying emerging issues, and then conducting rigorous research that often challenges common wisdom, provides insight and knowledge, and inspires and leads to change.

**Families and Work Institute's Corporate Leadership Circle
Notes from Conference Calls with the Chief Policy Advisors from the
Obama and McCain Presidential Campaigns
October 2008**

Our purpose is *to create research to live by*. For more information and for a complete listing of FWI's publications, please visit our Web site at: <http://www.familiesandwork.org>

FWI's Corporate Leadership Circle (CLC) offers a unique opportunity for leadership companies to stay ahead of the curve on issues that relate to the changing workforce, family, and community through conference calls, an annual Briefing, media and PR alerts, discounted conferences and publications, "Cluster Calls," and "Thought Leader Briefs."
<http://familiesandwork.org/site/support/clc.html>