

Senator Joni K. Ernst (R-IA)
Statement for the Record

Senate Finance Committee Paid Leave Working Group Roundtable:
“Paid Leave Proposals in the COVID Era”
June 18th 2020

I would like to thank Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Wyden, as well as Senator Cassidy and Senator Hassan for the chance to join a discussion on an issue that is a priority for me, and that is paid parental leave.

I come to this issue as a mom to a daughter. Raising a new baby, like my sweet Libby, during those first few weeks of life was thrilling and exhausting, but every moment spent changing her diaper, feeding her, and getting to witness her first smile was well worth it.

I believe the first few months following a birth or adoption are critical for healthy child development and bonding between a parent or parents and their new child.

This is why I have been working with my colleague, Senator Mike Lee, on a proposal offering paid parental leave to all new parents – moms and dads, natural and adoptive.

Our proposal – the CRADLE Act – would allow parents to voluntarily receive one, two, or three months of paid leave benefits by delaying their retirement by two, four, or six months. Benefit levels would be more generous to lower income families who need our help the most.

The CRADLE Act offers a paid parental leave solution without government mandates, without increasing taxes on individuals or businesses, and without adding to our national debt.

Once individuals who choose to take part in the program begin to delay their retirement for a short time period, the program would use funds provided on the front end to “repay” the general revenue fund, ensuring taxpayers are not left on the hook.

I think what sets our approach apart is that it gives parents greater flexibility without imposing a heavy-handed, new government mandate.

We all recognize that this COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant challenges for American families – health risks, financial insecurity, school and day care closures, etc. My approach with Senator Lee is a win-win for families seeking relief and for small businesses, who are struggling right now.

Finally, I want to say that we cannot have a conversation about paid parental leave without having a conversation about child care. Iowa has for years now had a growing child care crisis that has only worsened since the pandemic started. It is the reason I have worked with many of

you in this room on bills to address these challenges. Our economy cannot truly reopen unless working moms and dads know that their children are able to be in a safe environment.

I recognize that we all bring a lot of solutions to the table and the most important reason I am here today is to be part of the solution.

It is long overdue that our nation modernize family leave policies and remove barriers preventing parents from balancing work and raising a family.

Countless working moms and dads in Iowa, and across the country, face insurmountable hurdles in taking time off to bond with, and care for their new child.

I look forward to working with you in a bipartisan manner to come to the aid of our working moms and dads by providing comprehensive paid parental leave solutions. Families across the nation are counting on us, and I believe we should swiftly respond.