

Addressing:

## Our "Togetherness" Needs in Rebuilding The Black Family

A Legislative Perspective

BY Congressman William Clay  
(A Guest Columnist from Congress)



**Editor's Note:** This space is donated monthly primarily for use by the Black members of Congress and by the National Black Leadership Roundtable (NBLR). Its purposes are 1) to report to us on their stewardship in "completing the unfinished community-building work" of the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and 2) to challenge every member of our AOIP-affiliated and other organizations to assume far more responsibility in addressing the literacy enhancement and/or "community-building" needs of our long-denied masses.

Are you helping to "complete the unfinished work" of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by being a registered voter?

## Preserving Our Natural Resources

A twelve year employee of a government agency, Pat Cooper (not her real name), did not worry when her two-year-old daughter came down with a bad cold; she simply took leave and stayed home to nurse her. This would have been just another event in the life of a working parent if the cold had not lingered for more than a week. By the time the child was diagnosed as needing a lung transplant, Cooper's leave was nearly exhausted. Leave without pay became an option but her supervisor offered no guarantee her job would still be there or that her health benefits would continue. Needless to say, Cooper returned to work while her husband stayed home with their daughter. Eventually his leave will run out as well.

Families in this country are clearly struggling. Struggling to raise a family with traditional values in a world that no longer has time for traditions. An underlying reason for this fact is the new economic reality that requires all adult members of the vast majority of families to work outside the home. This was not true when today's adults were growing up. It is a relatively new phenomenon that is causing parents and children to feel an increasing strain. The Family and Medical Leave Act or H.R. 925, a bill I introduced February 3, 1987 in Congress, is an attempt to come to terms with this new reality.

The bill entitles an employee to 18 weeks of unpaid family leave over a 24-month period for the birth or adoption of a child or the serious illness of a child or parent. It also provides for up to 26 weeks of unpaid medical leave over a 12-month period if an employee is unable to work because of a serious health condition.

The bill applies to employers with 15 or more employees, and the only direct cost to employers is the requirement that pre-existing health coverage be continued during the period of leave. It requires employees, whenever possible, to give notice of impending leave and that leave be scheduled to accommodate the employer.

There is no shortage of rhetoric about how important it is to "restore the family." The fragility of families is blamed for everything from rising crime rates to illiteracy to teenage pregnancy to homelessness. What has been lacking is a clear understanding of what is causing families to struggle and a willingness to act on it.

Let me cite a few statistics. First, between 1950 and 1981, the participation rate of mothers in the work force tripled. Second, nearly 50 percent of all mothers with children under one year of age are now working outside the home, and finally, 96 percent of all fathers work and 60 percent of mothers work. Each of these figures has grown significantly in recent years.

We know something about picking up the pieces when families fall apart. We know it is difficult. We know that a lot of what we have tried has not worked. The Family and Medical Leave Act is a new approach. It is preventive medicine. It addresses the cause of the problem and not its symptoms.

If the family is straining because nobody is left at home to care for the newborn or seriously ill child or parent, then a labor standard that can substantially relieve that stress is good and necessary public policy. Giving employees the security of knowing that at times of great family need they can take up to 18 weeks of family leave or up to 26 weeks of medical leave when suffering from a serious health condition goes to the heart of what is causing families to struggle.

Contrary to the contention that the Family and Medical Leave Act is a new departure, it is consistent with a long tradition of labor law. In the past, our labor laws have reflected the view that disregarding important social values should not benefit an employer. Thus, for example, our labor laws mandate a minimum wage, prevent the abuse of child labor and mandate standards for the health and safety of workers. Each of these standards arose when unscrupulous employers were gaining a competitive advantage over employers who were acting responsibly. Labor standard laws have been proven to cost little compared to what they accomplish.

It is true that many employers today provide the kind of family and medical leave required by H.R. 925. They do so because it makes good business sense. Granting adequate leave helps assure the loyalty of a work force and promotes productivity. The large number of employers who have adequate leave policies demonstrates that it is possible to accommodate such leave. We should support these employers by not allowing their competitors to benefit from policies that deny employees leave in times of great need.

We plan on moving this legislation. In the previous Congress, the bill progressed through committee and was ready for a vote in the House when Congress adjourned. In this Congress, we began the process earlier with a Senate that is likely to be more sympathetic. We are hopeful that, with strong bipartisan support, the Family and Medical Leave Act will pass in the current Congress.

As we head toward the 21st century, we must become more mindful of our natural resources. We have already begun to look for ways to make synthetic materials substitute for minerals. In the same light, let us take care to preserve our most precious natural resource, the family.

## TOBACCO INDUSTRY..... (Continued from Page 8)



Thomas Shropshire

Miller is...committed to affirmative action, and I take personal interest in seeing that this policy is carried out. In the eight years since Miller was fully acquired by Philip Morris, the number of Blacks has increased more than 4,300 percent, while the total number of employees has grown about 400 percent. Blacks at Miller are not only brewery and clerical workers, but also the director of research, purchasing officer, industrial relations representatives, field sales supervisors, brewery manager, regional sales manager. In other words, Blacks are now at every level of the company's employment.

Miller has banking relations with minority banks, uses the services of minority-owned advertising agencies (such as Mingo-Jones Advertising, Inc. in New York), minority-owned public relations companies (Advertising Experti, also located in New York), and insures that minorities get a share of the construction dollars when we build a new facility....

In addition, minorities are well represented in the labor force on the site, and non-minority owned firms are buying supplies from minority companies.



Marshall Bass

When Marshall Bass joined RJ Reynolds in 1968, the corporation was emerging as a diversified, international corporation. So, too, was the company's need to become a leader in providing what Bass likes to speak of as "equitable" employment opportunities. Bass became a key player in the development of one of the broadest and best minority programs in American business. One of every four jobs at RJ

Reynolds Industries was filled by a minority, with Blacks employed in all job categories throughout the corporation, thanks largely to the imaginative, thoughtful, and determined efforts of Marshall Bass, who serves as Senior Vice President and one of 11 directors of the corporation.

Mr. Bass will also be representing his president and chief executive officer Mr. F. Ross Johnson on AOIP's largely White, corporate-led enabling board.



Stanley Scott

Stanley Scott, vice president and director of corporate affairs, says, "The atmosphere at Philip Morris is professional in every sense of the word. This company lives by its credo that its business activities must make social sense and its social activities must make business sense. It is a philosophy that affects all management decisions. Long before it became fashionable, Philip Morris was moving minorities and women into responsible positions."

A pioneer, who carved a pathway out of the corporate jungle on which Shropshire, Bass, and Scott trod to their rewarding careers, was the late Herbert H. Wright who joined Philip Morris Incorporated in 1945 as a salesman. Later, he was promoted to college supervisor and then to manager of public relations administration. Finally, Wright was named executive director of urban affairs. He spearheaded Philip Morris's early involvement in community affairs and in every viable cause addressing the rights of minorities.

Chief author of Philip Morris's wide study on corporate social responsibility, Wright created an awareness in his company that was unprecedented. During his 36 years with Philip Morris, people and organizations throughout the country were touched and influenced by this pioneering executive and leader in the struggle for human and civil rights.

Mr. Wilson's letter to President Reagan continues:

- The tobacco industry, for the educational needs of all Black Americans, was the very first of the major industries to support

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