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**EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE**

**Congressman George Miller, Chairman**

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Press Office, 202-226-0853

**Chairwoman Woolsey Statement at Subcommittee Hearing on  
“H.R. 4855, the Work-Life Balance Award Act”**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Lynn Woolsey (D-CA), chairwoman of the House Subcommittee on Workforce Protections, for a subcommittee hearing on the “H.R. 4855, the Work-Life Balance Award Act”*

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Today the Subcommittee on Workforce Protections is holding a legislative hearing on “H.R. 4855, the Work-Life Balance Award Act,” a bill I have introduced with Chairman Miller.

H.R. 4855 establishes an annual award at the Department of Labor for employers---both private and public-- with policies that contribute to work-life balance.

Today, if a child is fortunate to have two parents, most of them work outside the home and commute long hours.

And in a single-parent home it’s almost certain to be true.

So balancing work and family is a very real challenge for millions of workers in this country and is extremely important to their children.

Many years ago, when my children were not parents themselves, I was working full-time outside the home.

It was a struggle to meet both the needs of my family as well as the responsibilities of my job.

And as a human resource manager, I was aware that many of my employees were going through the same thing.

Unfortunately, some 30 years later, nearly every parent is under these pressures, and men as well as women are desperate for work-life balance.

One of the main reasons I ran for congress over 18 years ago was to fight for working families.

I was a new member when we passed the Family and Medical Leave Act (F-M-L-A), and I knew what an important step we were taking—particularly for working women—to provide job-protected family and medical leave for certain workers, even though it was unpaid.

Since then we have learned that more than 100 million leaves have been taken under the FMLA; that nearly 2 in 3 workers are not covered by the act; and even if they are, most can't take advantage of its provisions because they simply cannot afford to take unpaid leave.

About 8% of workers are fortunate to receive paid leave through their work, so we have a lot of room for improvement.

In fact, the U.S. lags far behind the rest of the world in providing paid leave and other work-life benefits to employees.

It is unacceptable that our country, which is the number one economy in the world--can barely compete with developing nations in this arena.

Workers should not have to choose between work and family, which is why I have introduced the balancing act, H.R. 3047, which lays out a blueprint for balancing work and family.

This effort to bring balance between home and the workplace must be waged on all fronts, and many in the business world are leading the way.

These companies know that providing work-life benefits increases retention, decreases absenteeism, and increases productivity.

And through recognition awards by such entities as Working Mother magazine, along with the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and the Families and Work Institute, employers are encouraged to assist their employees in bridging the challenges of work and family by adopting good work-life balance policies.

The bill we are examining today provides another incentive for employers.

I want to thank ranking member Cathy McMorris-Rodgers for her invaluable assistance in drafting this bill.

H.R. 4855, the Work-Life Balance Award Act, establishes an award at the Department of Labor to be presented annually to employers of any size that have exemplary work-life policies.

The bill also sets up an independent board appointed by the Secretary of Labor based on recommendations from Congress to develop criteria, as well as the application process.

The board is also charged with providing recommendations to the secretary of qualifying employers.

The board will consist of representatives from children and families' groups; state and local government; business or business organizations; and organized labor.

We have made a great start by introducing this legislation, but I believe that when we mark this bill up in the committee, we can further improve it by adding the minimal requirements for the advisory board to use in establishing its criteria for awardees.

For example, the bill should identify certain work-life practices on which employers would be measured.

While I do not have an exhaustive list, these policies could include paid sick leave to care of oneself or a sick family member and for the birth or adoption of a child; time off to attend children's extracurricular activities and school conferences; telecommuting; job sharing, and on site-child care.

While the bill requires the board to consider only those employers who are in compliance with all labor and employment laws, we certainly should consider the "whole company" as an example of a good employer, so an employer with wage and hour or OSHA citations may not qualify.

I would also be very interested in any suggestions that our witnesses have.

Creating an award at the U.S. Department of Labor, is important so that we can send the message that the federal government supports and encourages work-life balance.

This award, however, is not intended to supplant other awards, but to complement ongoing efforts.

Again thank you for coming, and I look forward to hearing from our wonderful witnesses.

I now yield to ranking member McMorris-Rodgers for her opening statement.

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