

Testimony of Congressman Alan M. Grayson
House Education & Labor Subcommittee on Workforce Protections Hearing
10:00 AM, June 11, 2009
2175 Rayburn H.O.B

Chairwoman Woolsey, Ranking Member Price, and my esteemed colleagues, thank you for allowing me to speak today on the importance of time off for America's workers.

I am a cosponsor of both H.R. 2339, the Family Income to Respond to Significant Transitions Act, and H.R. 2460, the Healthy Families Act, and I believe the passage of these two bills will make significant gains in the health, productivity, and wellbeing of our workforce.

These landmark pieces of legislation are long overdue. They should be passed, signed by the President, and immediately implemented to help our constituents and their families.

Congresswoman DeLauro, and Chairwoman Woolsey must be applauded for their long-time efforts on this legislation. And the thousands of groups, ranging from business and labor to family and medical advocacy groups should also be applauded for bringing this bill to where it is today.

Madame Chair, many of the reasons why I introduced the Paid Vacation Act, are the reasons why I am in favor of H.R. 2339 and H.R. 2460. In particular, I too believe that a healthy worker is a happy worker. And a happy worker is a productive worker.

Therefore, in addition to providing all workers in America paid sick leave, I also believe they should enjoy a week or more paid vacation each year.

How many American employees never get a day off? Guess. The number is over 27 million. That's right over 27 million workers in America never get a single day of paid vacation. And half of all American employees get less than a week each year. No wonder 69% of all Americans support the paid vacation bill.

The Paid Vacation Act would require companies with at least 100 employees to give full-time workers one week of paid vacation after a year of service.

Listen to people's comments on this legislation and you'll hear one thing over and over – “people need time to recharge their batteries.” They're right. Study after study has shown that people are healthier, happier, and more productive after a vacation – not just for the following week, or even the following month, but for the whole year. The gains in productivity make up for the time off, and more. What kind of workforce do we need? People who are stressed, burnt out, and pretending to work, or people who are rested, paying attention, and trying to get things done?

The statistics are startling. We spend more than \$3000 per employee per year on health care for stress-related conditions. Employees without vacations are much more likely to have a heart attack and die. We are literally working ourselves to death. We've all heard the saying “all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” Well, it turns out that all work and no play makes Jack a *dead* boy.

We're rightly proud of the fact that America leads the world in so many areas. Add this one to the list – we lead the world in employees who can never take a day off. Every major country in the world has a law that provide for paid vacations for employees – more than 140 countries. Why don't we?

And here's another category in which We Are Number One: the number of hours worked. A number that is up by 160 hours per year since 1976. Remember that one of the most successful ad campaigns in history told Americans, "you deserve a break today." That's right -- we do deserve a break.

Another reason why I believe this bill is important is because of the support it provides to American tourism.

As many of you may know, tourism is Florida's largest business. We have more than 75 million visitors a year, resulting in \$57 billion dollars for the state economy.

Madame Chair, this means jobs, jobs, jobs. My colleagues, from Florida, California, Hawaii, Nevada and elsewhere know that this bill would be great for our economy if more people went on vacation.

That's one reason why people are talking about our Paid Vacation Act. Media from Orlando to Fresno are talking about it, because it not only means *healthy* workers but more *jobs*.

I'll admit, there are some people who tell me that they oppose this bill. I ask them one question: "Do you get vacation?" Their answer always is "yes." So it turns out that they're not against vacations, just vacations for other people.

There is a good reason why my district, which includes Disney World and Universal Orlando, is called "the happiest place on earth." It's because the happy people who visit us all have one thing in common – they're on vacation.

Do you support family values? Then give 27 million Americans a chance to spend some time with their families.

In conclusion, I ask the committee to support the immediate passage of the Family Income to Respond to Significant Transitions Act, and the Healthy Families Act.

I would also ask my colleagues why the United States of America is the only major nation NOT to provide for paid vacation time. I encourage my colleagues to consider this important issue, and support this legislation.