

Cammarata blasts Clinton on family leave pay plan

By CHRIS FRANZ

The man who invented paternity leave, a published author on the subject of fatherhood and the Island's representative to the Board of Education, Jerry Cammarata, Ph.D., is going hammer-and-tongs after a Clinton administration proposal that would allow parents to receive unemployment benefits for time they take off from work for "parenting leave."

What's more, Cammarata, long an advocate of family leave, is proposing his own new system to pay for such time off, one funded by parents themselves.

In a press release obtained by

the *Register*, Cammarata blasted President Bill Clinton's proposal to allow states to pay unemployment benefits to workers who take time off to care for newborn infants. Clinton administration officials argue that the unemployment checks would help subsidize what is otherwise unpaid leave.

Employers, who pay for State unemployment benefits by contributing a separate tax to an unemployment insurance trust fund, and State officials who administer the program, are furious over regulation changes proposed by Clinton, which they say exceed Clinton's legal authority and circumvent congressional legisla-

tion.

Two years ago the federal Labor Department denied states the right to pay unemployment benefits for family leave, and for 60 years the established government policy has been that unemployment benefits may only be paid to those without jobs who are actively seeking work.

Under the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act, companies with more than 50 workers must offer employees up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for newborn infants, sick children or ailing relatives. The employees are not entitled to pay for the time off, but must be able to return to their jobs, or equivalent jobs for equivalent

pay.

State officials say that covering family leave from unemployment insurance funds would boost taxes for the fund by 15 to 20 percent.

Cammarata, who 28 years ago established a father's right to family leave in a landmark decision by the federal Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, said Clinton's action "will destroy the dignity and responsibility surrounding parenting if he indiscriminately uses unemployment insurance to pay parents to stay home."

Cammarata ironically won that right when he sued the Board of Education on which he now sits. He is the author of a book on fatherhood and wrote a long-running newspaper column on parenting issues.

"The bigger picture is not using the unemployment fund for parenting leaves, but rather, how do we help parents to take parenting leaves and at the same time be personally responsible for the financial implications?" he said.

Since he won his action for leave to take care of his own children, Cammarata has advocated the creation of "parenting leave accounts," tax-free savings accounts managed for employees by their employers similar to 401(k) retirement plans: employees would deposit money which would be matched by employers, and the money would not be taxed when drawn on to finance unpaid leaves.

"A parenting leave account should be used along with other benefits of leave time accrued by parents," Cammarata said. "With these options available, a parent could take eight to 12 weeks off to care for a newborn. After all, plan-

ning for the financing of parenting in the first 12 weeks of a newborn's life is as significant as financially planning for a child's college tuition, or for retirement."

"In the final analysis," Cammarata continued, "the problem of financially supporting parenting leaves should not be the job of government. This is a worker/management issue and deserves speedy acknowledgment by both parties. My proposal of a parenting leave account is reasonable, fiscally responsible, and allows for intelligent planned parenting.

"Once again, President Clinton engages in political action and rhetoric which appears practical on the surface and could enjoy mass appeal, but has the effect of destroying our most treasured union on earth - the family."