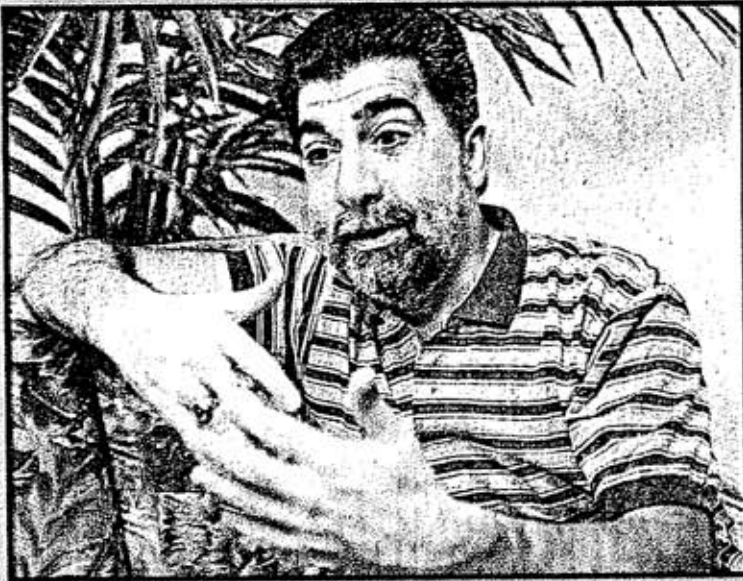


Thursday, February 18, 1993



Photographer: JIM URICK

Jerry Cammarata, who won the nation's first paternity-leave suit 20 years ago, supports President Clinton's family-leave bill but says corporate America must embrace it.

'Leave' activist urges business to get with it

By Nicole Piscopo
of the News staff

The man who won the nation's first paternity-leave suit 20 years ago applauds President Clinton's family-leave bill, but said business must embrace the legislation if this country is to succeed.

"The survival of corporate America is only going to depend on the survival of the family," Jerry Cammarata, author of *The Fun Book of Fatherhood*, said Wednesday. The

family-leave activist is on vacation in Jensen Beach.

Cammarata has had firsthand experience with an employer's reluctance to extend family-leave privileges.

In 1971, when his wife, Margaret, was pregnant with their second child, Cammarata launched a two-year battle with the New York City School System that resulted in a landmark decision stating that new fathers had the same rights to

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time off as new mothers.

Legally, family leave is thriving under the Clinton administration, he said. But a bill is just "window dressing," he said, if people don't use it.

"Legislation has shown the possibility, but it has to come from a very sympathetic corporate America."

Corporate America must make family leave not just acceptable, he said. They must encourage it.

"Fortune 500 corporate America has done a terrific, terrific job," Cammarata said. "But mid-level companies have to learn from them."

He said companies must use creativity to come up with ways for employees to use the 12 weeks of leave they are entitled to.

The immediate payback to employers, he said, is greater enthusiasm, loyalty and productivity.

In the longer term, though, future employees will be better for having been members of stable, intact families, he said.

"There's a larger stake than just the bottom line of this year," Cammarata said.

Cammarata, who is putting together a paper on family leave for the Clinton administration, sug-

gested mid-level companies try the following ideas:

- Start an employee fund for family leave so the employee can earmark savings. The fund can either be entirely employees' savings or the company can match the funds.

"It's one thing to know you can take 12 weeks," he said. "But the average person can't afford that. That's like dangling the carrot in front of them," he said.

- Companies should be more innovative in helping employees balance work and family responsibilities.

If a child is sick, instead of hiring a temporary worker to fill the employee's position, Cammarata suggests employers send a health-care worker to the employee's house, which would save the company money and show that it cares.

- A company's mission statements should encourage family leave.

- Get the employees and managers talking. Have "quality circle" discussions that bring together all levels of employees.

"These develop those interpersonal skills needed to raise a family: discussion and argument and coming to conclusions," he said.