

The following article appeared in the Washington Post on Mother's Day 2006.

Assignment: Annotate the following article focusing on **Persona, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, AND Subject**. Find examples of **ETHOS, PATHOS, AND/ OR LOGOS**. Analyze the effectiveness of each towards the main argument.

We Can Afford to Give Parents a Break

By **Jody Heymann**

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In an era when the mythology of motherhood is slowly yielding to the realities, it seems only appropriate to disabuse ourselves of some of the myths surrounding our government's treatment of mothers.

Perhaps the most obvious yardstick of governmental respect for mothers is maternity leave policy. Of 168 countries on which I collected data -- for Harvard University's Project on Global Working Families and at McGill University -- 164 have found a way to guarantee paid maternity leave. The only ones that haven't are Papua New Guinea, Swaziland, Lesotho and the United States. In most high-income countries, moms can receive help from dads who have paid parental leave. Indeed, in 27 countries fathers have a right to at least three months of paid leave at the birth of a child. Not in America.

Breast-feeding is crucial because it lowers infant morbidity and mortality three- to five-fold. But in America, there is no guarantee that mothers will be able to safeguard their infants in this way. While 76 countries ensure that mothers can take time from work to breast-feed their infants, America does not.

When children get sick, parents in 37 countries are guaranteed at least a minimum amount of paid leave to care for them. This is affordable because children get out of the hospital faster and recover from both chronic and acute illnesses more rapidly when parents are involved in their care. But the United States does not provide leave to parents of sick children or guarantee paid sick leave to any Americans for their own health problems -- despite the fact that personal sick leave is a basic right of citizens in more than 150 countries around the world.

While a low-income mother in the United States is twice as likely as a middle-class one to have a child with asthma or another chronic condition and twice as likely to be providing 30 hours or more of care a month for an elderly or sick parent, she is less likely to have the work flexibility she needs to provide that care. Half of middle-class Americans can rely on getting a job with sick leave; three quarters of low-income Americans cannot.

While American women and men agree that women still do more of the housework and provide more of the care both for children and aging parents, they have fewer benefits -- less sick leave, annual leave, flexibility at work.

The United States has engaged in a unique private-sector experiment -- as opposed to any partnership between the public and private. The experiment has tested what companies can and will offer voluntarily.

This means that companies that want to do the right thing by mothers are stymied. If they offer paid maternity leave, they have to compete with a company across the street that doesn't -- an uneven playing field that does not exist in most nations.

The conventional wisdom that the United States cannot afford to adopt more progressive and humane policies toward its own mothers and remain competitive in the global economy is upheld by certain myths.

Let's dispel at least three of them:

Myth 1: The United States can't compete while offering policies that would markedly improve the lives of most American parents and children. The World Economic Forum rated the four most competitive nations as Finland, the United States, Sweden and Denmark. All but the United States provide at least a month of paid annual leave, six months of paid parental leave and paid sick leave.

Myth 2: Decent working conditions will lead to high unemployment. Iceland enjoys among the world's lowest unemployment rates, at 3.4 percent, yet ensures that all its working citizens enjoy a month of paid annual leave and extensive paid sick leave.

Myth 3: Decent working conditions will inhibit economic growth. Ireland got the nickname "Celtic tiger" because its growth rate is among the world's highest -- 6.4 percent per year throughout the 1990s and in the early years of this decade. It achieved this growth rate while ensuring six months of paid parental leave, four weeks of paid annual leave, short- and long-term paid sick leave and unpaid leave to meet children's health needs.

If politicians of either mainstream persuasion in the United States really valued mothers and families on Mother's Day or any other day, they would commit to finally ensuring rights for American mothers and fathers that most parents around the world already enjoy. They would ensure that American mothers receive paid maternity leave, as mothers in 164 other nations do. They would ensure that moms have breast-feeding breaks and sick leave. They would support early childhood education and after-school programs. Then the United States could be truly competitive in the most meaningful sense, and "Happy Mother's Day" would be more than just another myth.

The writer is director of the McGill University Institute for Health and Social Policy, founder of the Project on Global Working Families at Harvard and author of "Forgotten Families: Ending the Growing Crisis Confronting Children and Working Parents in a Global Economy."