

**Bice & Houlahan Lead Bipartisan
Effort to Pass Paid Family Leave**

WASHINGTON, DC — At a time when an overwhelming majority of Americans support paid family leave around the country, The Ripon Society and Franklin Center for Global Policy Exchange hosted a breakfast discussion with two Members of Congress who are leading an effort to build support for the idea on Capitol Hill.

The Members are U.S. Reps. Chrissy Houlahan (PA-06) and Stephanie Bice (OK-05). Houlahan is a Democrat who served in the Air Force and Air Force Reserves and had a successful career in business before her election to the House in 2018. Bice is a Republican who worked for a thriving technology company and later served as Assistant Majority Floor Leader of the Oklahoma State Senate before her election to the House in 2020.

Earlier this year, the two lawmakers co-founded the Bipartisan Paid Family Leave Working Group. The pair appeared before Ripon and Franklin this past Friday morning to talk about the group, the importance of the issue, and – as working mothers from different parties and different backgrounds – the unique perspectives each brings to the effort.

“We both recognize that this is something that we have different perspectives on,” Bice stated, in remarks to help to kick off the discussion. “Coming from a military background and not having any leave time after giving birth was very difficult for Chrissy. For me, I was in a unique position. I have two daughters who are now 22 and 19. When I had my oldest daughter, I worked for a company 22 years ago that actually offered paid family leave. I didn’t know how rare that was.

“I was given six weeks of paid leave along with any vacation time that I had. And so we come at this from different perspectives, but we also recognize that this is something that has to happen. We are one of seven countries — developed countries in the world — that doesn’t have a paid family leave policy.”

According to Houlahan, that fact – that the U.S. was one of the few developed nations without paid family leave – was one of the reasons she and Bice decided to organize “a very small working group” on the issue.

“There’s six of us,” the Pennsylvania lawmaker said, “three on each side — Republican and Democrat — and we collaborate as well on the Senate side with a similarly- sized group that is also working on this issue. And I think the catalyst might have been the 30th anniversary of the Family and Medical Leave Act. The idea was that there clearly had to be something more that we could do, as Stephanie said, to join the industrialized world in having a more robust paid leave program.

“And so, what we decided to do is spend the first six to nine months really making sure that we all understood the issue together. I think in Congress, in Washington, we tend to do things in silos and separately — we listen to different information streams. What we tried to do in those first six to nine months was to have regular meetings, both with members and with staff, to try to understand what FMLA did, how it was successful or not successful, and what other states are doing. I think this is part of the reason why this is important right now — 13 states already



U.S. Reps. Chrissy Houlahan (left) & Stephanie Bice (right)

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are moving forward. And many more are teed up to do the same.”

Which is why, she added, Congress is at a “pivot point” when it comes to doing something on paid family leave.

“If we don’t do something at the federal level,” Houlahan stated, “it will be done for us around the country. And it will become really very difficult for businesses, and frankly humans, to manage that splintering. We then talked about what those states had done. We talked with a lot

of different stakeholders in various places to make sure we understood what had worked, or not worked the last time.”

This learning process, Bice stated, has been critically important.

“I think taking that time to walk through all of the stakeholders and really gain an understanding of what the nuances are — especially with states and what they’re doing, as we work to try to put something together — is needed,” she said. “I would also say there’s a lot of interest in this topic — not only on our side, but on the Senate side. You’ve had several Senators working on different initiatives. Some have been sort of palatable, some have not, but they are very engaged and want to be part of the conversation. And so,

it’s an exciting thing for us that we’re not just doing this independently, we actually have some traction on the other side of the rotunda to be able to get something done.

“Do we think it’ll be easy? No, we do not. We recognize fully that this is going to be a challenge and we want to get it done next year. We’ll see how next year shapes up. But I think we’re both committed to trying to figure out how to make this happen because it’s incredibly important. And as the mother of daughters who maybe someday will be mothers themselves, we want to make sure we’re providing that leave ability for them in their professional careers.”

Following their opening remarks, Houlahan and Bice were also asked a number of questions, including one about the importance of providing paid family leave to Americans who do not work full time.

“That’s actually a conversation we had very early on,” Bice stated. “We recognized that we wanted to sort of stick with the framework of FMLA if we could because that has worked for 30 years, and why deviate from that? But we also recognize that there are many individuals, particularly now, who are in the workforce on an hourly basis, whether it’s retail, whether it’s food service, you name it. How do we navigate that? There are some ways we can do that. It will be, I think, a conversation with industry as to what do those thresholds

look like in addition to number of hours. We also need to think about how long they need to be employed. Those are the pieces of the puzzle that we are starting to map out now after having spent nine months researching and doing a deep dive into all of the various areas of this and the stakeholders.”

Houlahan agreed.

“We really do have, I think, a shared interest in making sure that the majority of people who don’t have access to this kind of program are helped,” she said. “And those tend to be hourly workers. They tend to not be part-time workers per se, but people who are in retail, food services, those kinds of things. That benefits all of us if we have the ability to talk about that.”

It is also beneficial, Houlahan noted, to talk about the issue of paid family leave from one other perspective, as well.

“We often talk about it from the Mom’s perspective,” she stated. “But I think it’s incredibly important that Dads are also engaged in this conversation . . . And that’s becoming increasingly more welcomed and popular in Congress. You may or may not have noticed that there’s now a Dad Caucus.”

“And one of them,” Bice added, “is part of our group.”

Founded in 1978, The Franklin Center for Global Policy Exchange is a non-partisan, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization committed to enhancing global understanding of important international issues. The Franklin Center brings together Members of the U.S. Congress and their international parliamentary counterparts as well as experts from the Diplomatic corps, foreign officials, senior private sector representatives, scholars, and other public policy experts. Through regular conferences and events where leading international opinion leaders share ideas, the Franklin Center promotes enlightened, balanced, and unbiased international policy discussion on major international issues.