

PL+US & PL+US ACTION POLITICAL PROGRAM

Intro

Despite year-over-year support amongst policy makers and voters for a federal paid family and medical leave policy, the issue has lacked the political power and electoral salience to move from concept to policy. Building political power is key to winning a high-quality federal paid leave policy: paid leave champions need to be celebrated and rewarded electorally for their leadership, and opponents need to be held accountable at the ballot box.

To build political salience, PL+US's affiliated 501(c)(4), PL+US Action, worked in partnership with its allies during the 2018 and 2020 election cycles on a pilot effort to introduce paid leave in an electoral context and establish the political value of paid leave before a new Congress and a new Administration went to Washington.

Structurally, PL+US created a 501(c)(4) organization and PL+US Action leadership independently established a Political Action Committee (PAC) that could fundraise and financially contribute to paid leave champions, complimenting the traditional advocacy work of the 501(c)(3). The decision to add a 501(c)(4) and PAC was an overwhelmingly positive development given the limited c4 capacity within the broader paid leave movement. PL+US's expanded structure also allowed for more concerted engagement with members of Congress in crucial posts and committees of jurisdiction for paid leave.

2018 & 2020 Electoral Programs

During the 2018 election cycle, PL+US Action launched its initial foray into electoral work by releasing a paid leave scorecard on key candidates and endorsing a broad slate of candidates across political ideology. The scorecard effort showed that there was an appetite from voters and the media to understand where candidates stood on paid leave and demonstrated candidate interest in receiving and promoting a strong score on the issue.

Ahead of the 2020 election, PL+US Action took what it learned from the 2018 midterms, assessed the cycle's battleground map, and made a strategic choice: instead of focusing on a broad slate of candidates, PL+US Action would go deep in a few races that were most likely to be critical to passing paid leave legislation. PL+US Action would seek to enter high-value elections early, vocally support candidates based on their stated support for paid leave, and engage in strategic voter contact efforts that deepened localized voter support and illustrated paid leave's turnout potential.

PL+US Action launched this program in the Democratic Presidential Primary by building on its [2019 report with Georgetown's Center on Poverty and Inequality](#) to educate and engage Democratic candidates on the scope of high quality paid leave policy. By providing economic and medical data, messaging and the opportunity for public praise, PL+US helped to get nearly every Democratic candidate to include a pro-paid leave stance in their platform. This included then-Senator Kamala Harris who introduced the most

progressive framework supporting six months of paid family and medical leave, as articulated in the organization's Georgetown Center report. This work seeding paid leave in the Democratic primary built early awareness of the issue and contributed to the organization formally endorsing the Biden/Harris ticket in the 2020 general election. This was the first time the organization had endorsed a presidential candidacy and offered opportunities to support the campaign with message and research resources, paid and social media, and the production of a signature event, "Conversation on Care," featuring future Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff.

As part of this cycle, PL+US Action built targeted, 360° electoral programs in Arizona, Iowa, and North Carolina and a limited program in Georgia – four battleground states with critical, highly contested Senate seats and important down-ballot contests. PL+US Action focused on races where it believed that either (a) a potential winner might hold sway in a key committee of jurisdiction, or (b) paid leave support would impact a politically vital constituency. PL+US Action supported these programs with the following:

- + **Message Testing:** Conducted polling and focus groups to understand the importance of paid leave to voters.
- + **Voter Mobilization:** Purchased the voter files for Arizona, Iowa, and North Carolina and ran a grassroots text and email program to activate voters and the PL+US Action list.
- + **Event and Messaging Support:** Created customized, localized events and engagement opportunities for candidates (for example, PL+US Action organized a roundtable for now-Senator Mark Kelly (D-AZ) with small businesses who supported paid leave) and worked with the candidates and campaigns on messaging and media training ahead of key events.
- + **Paid Media:** Using message research, determined that additional education about paid leave was necessary and created an ad campaign, A New Normal, to meet this need; also invested in targeted digital ads and social media boosting to assist in voter mobilization.
- + **Earned Media Support:** PL+US Action provided a press release, social media toolkit, custom digital ads, and other assets to broadcast support for paid leave to voters, especially women and families.

The Build Back Better Campaign

By January 5th, 2021, a moment of political opportunity emerged as Democrats won two U.S. Senate run-off victories in Georgia. The White House, the U.S. House, and the U.S. Senate had just come under Democratic control, exposing a clear path for the passage of federal paid leave legislation.

Building on the relationships developed with the incoming Biden administration and congressional champions during the 2020 campaign, PL+US Action first worked to illustrate how efforts to advance paid leave legislation would be supported by high value political constituencies, with a special focus on women and businesses. These early efforts succeeded in late April 2021 when President Biden announced the American Families Plan, which included a robust plan for comprehensive paid family and medical leave and eventually became a core component of the Build Back Better agenda.

Over the months that followed, PL+US Action and the broader coalition fought relentlessly to pass paid leave through the Build Back Better Act with a campaign that included:

- + **Hiring expert political and strategic communications consultants and lobbyists:** With the right committee relationships - namely with the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions - PL+US and PL+US Action's consultants and lobbyists were able to gather essential intelligence that helped the movement to be more strategic and targeted.
- + **Bringing business voices to the Hill and the White House:** Because of its years of prior work engaging the business community, PL+US was able to bring supportive small and large businesses and their leaders - vital constituencies given the role business opposition had played in previous efforts to pass paid leave - to the fight for paid leave. In one significant effort, PL+US and coalition partners organized an open sign-on letter for businesses signed by 350 companies and spearheaded a virtual fly-in week where business leaders from across the country spoke directly with key members of Congress, both of which were supported by a significant paid and earned media effort.
- + **Deploying significant resources on paid media:** Together, PL+US and PL+US Action spent nearly \$2 million on paid media in 2021 alone, primarily on TV, radio and digital ads in 25 media markets, marking one of the most significant media investments to date on paid leave. The paid media was informed by message testing and polling and featured the voices of key storytellers, including small business owners and women - electorally critical constituencies.
- + **Mobilizing voter support:** Through its own list of supporters and by engaging other relevant communities of support, PL+US Action was able to power more than 250,000 emails to members of Congress in support of paid leave. PL+US Action also organized a grassroots SMS campaign that sent 1.6 million texts to voters in key states (VA, AZ, NH), urging them to reach out to their representatives (who were key in the Build Back Better negotiations) to voice their support for paid leave. In addition, PL+US Action conducted a satellite media tour that focused on paid leave on radio and TV stations in more than 25 media markets, localizing the issue for voters and members of Congress.

Results & Opportunities Ahead for the Paid Leave Movement

In part, thanks to the political program that PL+US Action ran with its allies in the months and years leading up to its introduction, the U.S. House passed paid leave in the Build Back Better package in November 2021. This was a historic milestone and advanced paid leave closer to final passage than any proposal in the more than 29 years since the passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act in 1993.

In the years to come, the movement can continue to build political value for paid leave in order to achieve its legislative north star: a comprehensive paid family and medical leave policy for every working person. Most importantly:

- + **Invest more significantly in a political program.** PL+US' pilot political program helped build political salience and shore up key champions in Congress. With more resources and investment for 501(c)(4)s and PACs, this program could be scaled for greater impact. In particular, paid media and digital advertising placement are incredibly cost-intensive but easily scalable. Additional funding would be especially helpful for expanding the array of voting blocks to which the paid leave movement could appeal.

- + **Create structures that allow for the full range of political power building.** For example, creating a structure such as a single dedicated 501(c)(4) or such entities with multiple movement partners will enable legal, compliant political engagement on behalf of paid leave. Likewise, a Political Action Committee (PAC) is an essential, complementary vehicle for building political power that makes it easier for the paid leave movement to secure a seat at key electoral tables.
- + **Invest in experienced political consultants and lobbyists with deep political and legislative relationships.** Engaging experienced political consultants and/or lobbyists is crucial for gathering high-quality intelligence and influencing legislators and candidates.
- + **Endorse candidates on paid leave and position the issue in a broader care platform:** Endorsing candidates based on their support for paid leave is critical and building a public record of that support is essential for create a political to legislative through line. Positioning paid leave in tandem with other care priorities like childcare and pre-k can increase visibility for a care platform more broadly and allow for coordination for multi-issue partners and political organizations.
- + **Praise and accountability need to work in tandem.** Based on PL+US' endorsement work, the rewards and praise of endorsement for pro-family leave candidates typically delivers a durable commitment to the issue. However, accountability tactics used off-cycle can help engage potential champions and bring them into the fold. This dynamic is particularly notable because the opposite was typically true for PL+US' corporate accountability campaigns, where the shaming of well-known brands on the lack of paid leave typically had a demonstrable impact.
- + **Engage more with existing political entities & power brokers on both the left and the right.** For example, working with entities like the DNC, the DCCC, the Democratic Mayors Association, and others to include paid family leave in their platforms, including in message testing, could pay real dividends going forward.
- + **Continue looking to other movements and campaigns' tactical and strategic actions for political success - and invest in them.** While PL+US' pilot political program made some key investments for the paid leave movement, it generally employed tried-and-true strategies for political power building for all kinds of legislative campaigns. PL+US Action was successful not because it reinvented the wheel, but because it could secure the resources and funder support necessary to engage in the tactics that corporate influence teams finance year after year.

The targeted political program that PL+US Action piloted from 2018-2022 helped take federal paid leave policy further than ever before towards legislative passage. These strategies, tactics, and lessons learned provide a political model that works and can be scaled with greater investment, positioning the larger paid leave movement for an inevitable win in the years to come.