

WOMAN

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MISCARRIAGES AND VDT USE

A three-year, \$3.5 million study will try to determine whether women working in computer chip manufacturing suffer high rates of miscarriage and why.

The Semiconductor Industry Association will fund the study of 50,000 semiconductor workers. The University of California will conduct the study. If a reproductive hazard is apparent, researchers will study whether chemicals, heat, radiation or stress are responsible.

The study was prompted by a cluster of miscarriages at Digital Equipment Corporation in Maynard, Massachusetts. There are about 94,000 men and women manufacturing computer chips; 47% are women, most of childbearing age.

(from USA Today 1/6)

Miscarriages at USA Today's Rosslyn office are also being investigated. Fourteen miscarriages were reported since September 1987 by women working in the newsrooms. Although the women work in areas undergoing reconstruction, tests have found no hazards from the construction materials or the building's air. The VDTs will be tested, and a reproductive toxicologist has been contacted.

(from Washington Post 12/13)

In Off Our Backs

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FOLK REMEDIES IN DANGER

The "superstitious" remedies of folk medicine have repaid scientific scrutiny time and again but have yet to receive the systematic study they deserve, according to Dr. Dorothy

Bray, a pharmacologist at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The matter is the more urgent because medically important plant species are disappearing with the spread of deforestation and desertification. Brays feels strongly, "that more research should be concentrated on the healing potential of plants, and that tapping the knowledge of traditional healers would eliminate the hazards of random research".

Dr. Bray says that "between 25,000 and 75,000 species of plants --about ten percent of known flowering plant species -- are used by traditional healers. Only two percent have been chemically examined, and it is these, directly or indirectly, which have yielded virtually all the drugs we have on the market today. We need to look at the other 98 percent". So, "after nearly three years of preparation Dorothy Bray set out on a four thousand mile hike across Africa collecting plant specimens recommended by local traditional healers. Her initial brief to collect samples of anti-malarial plants swelled into a multi-remedial 100 kilo bag of specimens, which she sent back to London. The bag contains a life-time's work for several research teams".

(from New African)

From World Development Forum
Vol. 6 #19 October 31, 1988

PARENTAL LEAVE

The Tennessee Valley Authority has approved a parental leave policy. Employees will be allowed up to ten weeks of unpaid leave to be home with newborn children or to deal with family health problems. Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) is an independent federal agency of the United States providing electricity to several south-east states.

Tennessee passed a maternal leave bill requiring companies to allow unpaid leave to women who deliver or adopt children. Using the argument the law discriminated against fathers of adopted children, conservatives amended the law to only apply to birth mothers.

Twenty-one states have some parental leave law, although they vary in applying only to state employees, companies employing fifty or twenty workers. Five states provide "paid" leave to residents under programmes similar to disability insurance. The State of Maryland's Montgomery County, an affluent suburb of Washington, is considering paid parental leave for county employees at its council meeting of February 7th. William E. Hanna Jr., the bill's sponsor estimates it would cost the county \$400,000 annually.

The metropolitan Washington area has the highest percentage of working mothers, over 50 percent. In August Maryland's Howard County became the first government in the area to offer parental leave. Mothers can take thirteen weeks off, fathers six weeks. The District's parental leave bill died at the end of City Council's session December 23rd. Baltimore's Commission for Women has recommended Charm City provide its employees ten weeks of maternity and three days of paternity leave and allow any worker sixteen weeks to care for infants, newly adopted children or seriously ill dependents.

Democrats are bound to reintroduce the federal parental leave bill. It may become a test of Bush's commitment to "family issues". George Bush opposed the bill last year because it "mandates" the leave policy. Fred Krebs of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce said the second most important concern of small-business owners is mandated benefits.

A study commissioned by 9-5, the National Association of Working Women, found job growth in seven states offering parental leave outpaced job growth in seven "pro-business" states by about 9%. Job growth in both large and small businesses was about 9% greater. While business rightly or wrongly opposes parental

leave, elected officials find broad support for it. A Peter Hart poll conducted in September found voters were 5 to 1 less favourable toward a Senator or Representative who opposed parental leave.

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US SUPREME COURT REVIEWS ABORTION

The United States Supreme Court has decided to review a Missouri law that severely restricts abortions. Reproductive rights activists fear that the court might overturn or narrow its 1973 decision in Roe v. Wade that granted women the right to abortion.

Last year, Justice Lewis Powell, Jr., who had been the fifth justice in decisions upholding Roe v. Wade in recent years, retired and was replaced with Justice Arnold Kennedy, who does not seem likely to champion abortion rights.

However, the Missouri law so severely limits free speech--it prevents the use of state funds for abortion counselling as well as abortions--that the case, Webster v. Reproductive Health Services, may not be a vehicle the Supreme Court would use to overthrow Roe v. Wade. A federal appeals court has held that the Missouri law is unconstitutional, but the state is appealing that decision. The Reagan administration filed a friend-of-the-court brief urging the Supreme Court to uphold the Missouri law.

Former National Organisation for Women President Eleanor Smeal suggests that only a few states, such as Alaska, Hawaii, New York, Oregon, Vermont and Washington, would be likely to retain

liberal abortion laws if the Supreme Court allowed states to impose more restrictions on abortions.

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BUSH APPOINTS SULLIVAN

President-elect George Bush announced the appointment of Dr. Louis Sullivan, president of Morehouse School of Medicine, as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Sullivan, Bush's only Black cabinet appointee, recently told the Atlanta Journal and Constitution that he supports a woman's right to have an abortion. Sullivan, however, said he opposes federal funding of abortions.

Right-wing Republicans immediately urged that Sullivan be denied the HHS post because he is insufficiently anti-abortion. Sullivan later denied that he supports the right to abortion and said he would support a constitutional amendment barring abortion except in cases of rape and incest and to save the woman's life.

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US SURGEON GENERAL MAKES STATEMENT ON ABORTION

United States Surgeon General Koop, who was appointed by President Reagan because of his strong anti-abortion views, decided not to issue a report on whether abortion causes women physical or emotional harm. Last year, Reagan asked Koop to prepare a report on the health effects of abortion on the assumption that Koop would report that abortion harmed women.

However, Koop apparently was unable to bring himself to report that legal abortion rarely has harmful effects on women's health. Koop said, "scientific studies do not provide conclusive data about the health effects of abortion".

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