

Legislative Update: What to Look for in 2004

Health care coverage, minimum wage increases, and Family Medical Leave are a few of the topics that will likely be addressed by Congress in 2004. Some of the HR related legislation that is pending in Congress addresses these issues.

The Family and Medical Leave Clarification Act, would clarify the definition of "serious health condition" and limit eligible leave requests to a minimum of four hours or a half workday to reduce administrative tracking burdens. Although the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was enacted in 1993, there have been continued concerns from HR professionals regarding the definitions of "serious health conditions" and "intermittent leave". This legislation could help to correct the issues with the act, by making it easier to administer and getting back to the act's original intent with regard to the type of health conditions that are covered.

The Family Medical Leave Expansion Act would extend FMLA coverage to employees at worksites with 25 employees (currently 50) within 75 miles. It also allows eligible employees leave for addressing domestic abuse, and up to 24 hours in a twelve month period for school involvement activities.

With the rising costs of health care, health insurance coverage will continue to be a hot topic in 2004. The major issues include the number of uninsured, medical liability and prescription drug costs. There are a number of bills pending related to health care. Several of these provide tax credits to small businesses that offer health coverage to their employees. In addition, the legislation proposes associations that would allow small businesses to band together to purchase health insurance.

The Fair Minimum Wage Act would amend the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) to increase the minimum wage by \$1.50. The increase would occur in two steps, 75 cents 60 days after enactment, and 75 cents one year later. This would take the minimum wage to \$6.65 per hour.

Attendance: The New Importance of Being There

Given the tight labor market, companies have to manage employee absences better, says Watson Wyatt Worldwide, a consultant in Bethesda, MD. It surveyed 106 employers with more than 1000 workers each and found that firms using absence management techniques, had an absence rate of 2.1 percent, their lowest in 10 years. The cost of absence was still high, as much as \$600 per worker.

Companies have fewer workers to pick up the slack when someone is absent, they say, making the situation even more difficult than in previous years.

Famous People:NextJob Interview

Julius Caesar: My last job involved a lot of politics and back stabbing. I'd like to get away from all that.

Jesse James: I can list among my skills: leadership, travel planning, logistical organization, an understanding of fire-arms, and knowledge of security measures at banks.

Marie Antoinette: My management style has been criticized, but I like to think of myself as a people person.

Joseph Guillotine: I can give your company a headstart on the competition.

Hamlet: My previous position was eliminated in a hostile takeover.

Pandora: I like discovering new things.

Genghis Khan: I'm good at downsizing. On my last job, I downsized my staff, my organization, and the population of several countries.

Lady Godiva: What do you mean this isn't business casual?

GETTING THEM IN SYNC

If you can encourage people to laugh with you, you have won them over, however briefly, to your side. You have created an atmosphere of consensus, a moment where everyone is in sync.