

Paid parental leave 'over my dead body', says Abbott

Reports that Liberal leader Tony Abbott is considering a taxpayer-funded paid maternity leave scheme must be treated with extreme suspicion given his track record as a supporter of WorkChoices and previous hardline opponent of helping working mothers, say unions.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow said the Howard Government's WorkChoices had undermined pay and conditions for women, and it was simply not credible that Mr Abbott believed in supporting working mothers and would actually deliver on such a scheme.

She said that when it came to women in the workforce, Mr Abbott was an unreconstructed traditionalist who was now attempting to court the female vote.

"After years of entrenched views antagonistic to the interests of women, Tony Abbott is now trying to con the electorate," Ms Burrow said.

"His real views are contained in comments he has made in recent days that housework and ironing are the role of women.

"During his years as Employment Minister under John Howard, Mr Abbott never made any attempt to introduce a paid parental leave scheme. He is on record as opposing it."

In 2002, he told a Liberal Party function in Victoria:

"Compulsory paid maternity leave? Over this Government's dead body, frankly."

Ms Burrow said women fared extremely badly under WorkChoices, which took away job and income security, and made it harder for mothers to balance their work and family responsibilities.

"To its credit, the Rudd Government has committed to a fully-funded, universal scheme that will start next year," Ms Burrow said.

"Will Mr Abbott support this legislation – or block it, like he does with every positive initiative from the Government?"

"We already know that Mr Abbott wants to re-introduce WorkChoices policies into Australian workplaces.

"Working parents simply cannot trust him to do the right thing."