



TAKE BACK YOUR TIME
OCTOBER 24 WWW.TIMEDAY.ORG

NEWSLETTER - February 2009

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - JOHN DE GRAAF

Dear Take Back Your Timers:

Well, in between the inauguration of a new president and the grim news about the economy, a lot has been going on with Take Back Your Time.

I was delighted to see prominent economist Dean Baker's (he spoke at our WHAT'S THE ECONOMY FOR, ANYWAY conference in 2007) proposal (included in this newsletter) that suggested that a portion of a stimulus package be used to encourage shorter work-time and more vacations.

I was also pleased with President Obama's message in his inaugural address saluting workers who "take shorter hours and pay cuts rather than see their fellow workers laid off." At the signing of Obama's first bill, the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, Michelle Obama again stated strongly her concern about work-life balance.

Jared Bernstein, a DC economist who has been supportive of more free time for American workers (and who also spoke at our WHAT'S THE ECONOMY FOR, ANYWAY? conference), has been appointed to direct

Vice President Biden's major task force on improving the lives of middle class. So, amid the gloom about the economy there are some very encouraging signs.

VACATION CONFERENCE—PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF YOU CAN COME

Perhaps the biggest news is that we've set a date and place for our national Vacation Matters Summit. It will be held at Seattle University, Monday evening, August 10 to Wednesday afternoon, August 12. We are looking for speakers, sponsors, attendees, interns and conference planners. If you are interested in helping and/or attending, please let me know at: jodg@comcast.net. The sooner we start to get an idea about attendance the better. You can find a tentative conference program at: <http://www.timeday.org/summit.asp>. We expect to have some amazing speakers and presentations. It's the kick off to what we hope may become an annual event and real push the vacation issue to the forefront.

FACEBOOK

I've just discovered that there are a number of TAKE BACK YOUR TIME sites now on Facebook, with hundreds of members overall. They all direct traffic to our Web site and support our goals. The largest was started by Natalia Rotman, in Miami, Florida, and includes more than 400 hundred members. You can join it at:

<http://www.facebook.com/n/?group.php&gid=4702736826>

Thanks to Natalia for that! In the next newsletter, I'll do a rundown of some of the other sites.

STUDENT CHAPTERS

At Penn State University, students have started a TAKE BACK YOUR TIME group. Consider starting a chapter at your school!

WASHINGTON INITIATIVE CAMPAIGN

In Washington State, a group of us are exploring the possibility of an initiative campaign for paid vacation time. We are currently conducting a statewide poll to see what the support levels are—preliminary results show at least a 3-2 margin in favor—more on that in the next newsletter!

I recently made a presentation on the campaign for paid vacation time, along with presenters who spoke about family and sick leave, in a strategy session organized by the Center for State Innovation in Madison, Wisconsin. You can find the presentations and background materials at <http://www.stateinnovation.org/wednesday-briefing.php>.

I think you'll find these materials very useful. A lot is percolating from the States!

PLEASE CONTRIBUTE TO TAKE BACK YOUR TIME!

Of course, I can't finish a letter like this without a request for support. TAKE BACK YOUR TIME is still a small and poorly-funded organization despite our thousands of members. Your contributions keep us alive: Please donate:



Or send a check to CRESP/TAKE BACK YOUR TIME at:

Take Back Your Time
PO Box 19862
Seattle, WA 98109

Remember, there's no present like the time!

John de Graaf

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR - KELLEY SMITH

Looking forward to the coming year, there is a question swirling around in my head. Perhaps some of you are asking this same question. My question is about freedom. We Americans say we value freedom, perhaps above all else. But, what do we mean when we say "freedom," and is there something missing?

I am afraid that when many of our public figures try to describe what they see as the "great things" about American life, they mention freedom, but always in the context of the plethora of choices for consumer goods. Former President Bush reminded us, after the World Trade Center tragedy, that terrorists resent "our freedom" but he was quick to suggest that we "go shopping." In other words, we describe ourselves as "free" but we associate consumer goods or perceived luxuries as the best thing our country has to offer, rather than thinking of the freedoms granted us in our Constitution.

Being "free to buy" (an option only available to people with piles of cash or lines of credit) is not the same as being "free to live."

What if some of us would rather be free to choose how much (or how little) we buy, and thus have freedom to choose a shorter workweek? What if some of us wish for the freedom to have more time with our children and less time at the office? Many Americans find themselves facing an all-or-nothing deal. Employees have the option of a job that includes commuting and a good deal of overtime versus no job at all. And with the recent downturn in the economy, these are the lucky people!

Rather than conclude this is all hopeless, let's consider the luminaries who are talking about reduced working hours in response to the current financial meltdown. The idea of a shorter workweek has hardly seen the light of day in the mainstream press for my entire lifetime, and now almost everyone is talking about it! Our economic situation looks grim, but perhaps this could be a time when we can achieve something we might never have thought possible. Imagine passing on an old but improved tradition to the next generation - an expanded vision of freedom.

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From Our Board Members

JOBLESS—"TIME" TO PLAN WISELY

By Bonnie Michaels

You've lost your job and now you have more time than you ever expected. It may be difficult for you to move from the worry and anxiety of loss—jobs, money, home, hopes and dreams. You've lost your safety net and now what? Remember when you were complaining about not having time for self, family, friends, a more meaningful job, etc.? Well, this unexpected time off can be viewed as an opportunity. Don't panic! Allow yourself the chance to redesign your work-life so that you are living a life that is sustainable and meaningful. It is a time to reflect on all aspects of your life—career, friendships, partners, lifestyle, money, and community involvement.

Just like an organization that goes through a major upheaval and makes changes, you, too, must do a major work-life assessment.

We are entering a new era and the work-life model you choose must be sustainable. In this case, sustainable means that the career, lifestyle, and support systems will have longevity. For example, if an organization develops a sustainable energy plan it must be comprehensive to enable the organization to live so that daily needs are met long term. Your sustainable work-life plan must take into consideration **all** aspects of your work-life choices in order to sustain long term as well as short term needs.

The tendency is to grab the first job that comes your way without thinking about the long-term consequences. If you are truly at the bottom of your savings, find something part-time or restructure your living situation. This will give you the necessary time to rebuild your life in a way that will have long lasting benefits.

Here are some considerations to begin your self-assessment:

- **Career Choices** that are based on the needs of a global community or larger will have greater longevity
- **Your Relationship to Money** and how it is connected to your happiness and lifestyle choices
- **Where You Live** and how your choice will affect the time and money you spend driving vs. a community that is pedestrian or commuter friendly
- **The lifestyle** you choose and whether or not it will be affordable in the future and be environmentally conscious in the longer run.
- **Transportation choices** and how affordable and available they will be in the future.
- **Your Family, Friends, and Community** support systems that will help keep you grounded through change and loss.
- **Spiritual Life** and how it allows for time to reflect to keep you strong to get you through life's changes and challenges.

The categories and questions above are starting points for your self-assessment. After your analysis, you can begin to set new goals and timelines.

A life built on reflection is a smart and sustainable life. Take the time before you jump into something new.

Build a life you love and one that is sustainable.

Bonnie Michaels is a board member and work-life consultant, speaker, and author. mwfam@aol.com

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Feature Articles

WHEN LESS IS MORE

By Dean Baker

It is important that some version of President Obama's stimulus package get approved by Congress as quickly as possible. The package will be an important first step toward stopping the downward slide.

However, the package is only a first step. As President Obama's own economic team's analysis showed, the package would still leave us with 7.0 percent unemployment two years from now (roughly the current rate), even if things go relatively well. And it is easy to imagine scenarios that are worse than the baseline assumed in this analysis; for example, a collapse of the banking system due to a tidal wave of bad debt or a run on the dollar resulting from our chronic trade deficit. In short, we should be constructing plans to boost the economy that go beyond this stimulus package.

I have already written about one possibility: [health care insurance](#). The government can quickly provide a boost to demand by awarding generous tax breaks to employers for covering workers who do not already have insurance and for making current policies more generous. These tax breaks can be coupled with the opening of Medicare to anyone who wants to buy in, thereby getting a jump start on President Obama's health insurance program.

The other obvious way to provide a quick boost to the economy is by giving employers tax incentives for shortening their standard work week or work year. This can take different forms. An employer who currently provides no paid vacation can offer all her workers 3 weeks a year of paid vacation, approximately a 6 percent reduction in work time.

Alternatively, employers may cut the standard workweek, say from 40 hours to 36 hours, a 10 percent reduction in work hours. Employers could also adopt policies such as offering workers paid sick leave. If this averaged 5 days a year, this would come to a reduction in hours of 2 percent. They could even offer paid parental leave.

These policies would bring the United States in line with the rest of the world. In other wealthy countries, [paid vacation time is standard](#), with the average being close to 5 weeks a year. Similarly, we are the only wealthy country that does not require employers to give workers [paid time off for parenting](#) or to provide paid sick days.

The government could give employers an incentive to provide paid time off now by giving tax breaks to cover all or most of the paid time off. For example, if firms gave workers 3 additional weeks of paid vacation a year, the government could offer to provide a tax break for two years that would cover this cost up to \$2,500 per worker for the two years covered by the stimulus package. This sum would be sufficient to fully cover three weeks of vacation for workers earning less than \$40,000 a year, which would be most workers in the economy.

This is a neat form of stimulus because it directly gives employers an incentive to hire more workers, as can be easily shown. Suppose employers of 50 million workers take advantage of this deal, cutting their workers' time by an average of 6 percent as discussed in this example. These 50 million workers will have exactly as much money to spend as they did previously, so presumably their consumption will not be affected.

However, the employer will now be getting 6 percent less work performed because everyone is only working 49 weeks a year, rather than 52 weeks. Since demand for the companies' products will not have changed, and the companies' labor costs have not changed (the additional cost was picked up by the government), they will presumably want to hire roughly 6 percent more workers to make up for the lost hours.

If employers of 50 million workers took up the deal, then this 6 percent would translate into 3 million jobs. This would be a very good start for getting the economy back towards full employment.

There are of course many other benefits that workers could get by working fewer hours. They would have more time to spend with their children or pursuing hobbies and other non-work activities. In a country where many couples rarely see each other because they alternate work schedules to allow for child care, some additional free time [could have enormous value](#). Arguably, it would even [be beneficial for the environment](#).

Of course, the plan is that the tax credits just run for two years or long enough to help the economy get back on its feet. After the tax credits are ended, companies may go back to their current practices, but it is also possible that workers will value a shorter work schedule so much that the practice is left in place. Let's hope that we have the chance to find out.

Dean Baker is the director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, D.C. -- This article was published on January 26, 2009 by [The Guardian Unlimited](#).

ANOTHER STIMULUS PLAN IDEA

By Tom Walker, former Take Back Your Time board member

I just posted a modified version an alternative stimulus plan to the Economix blog at the New York Times. <http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/12/12/the-ideal-stimulus-package/>
The constraints of that exercise was that it was a \$500 billion dollar stimulus package

The concept behind my stimulus plan is simple: a basic leisure income guarantee linked to a voluntary cap of 1700 annual hours of work. The exact amount of the monthly payments would depend on how many people opt for the cap on hours of work. But assuming 200 million adults, a 500 billion stimulus package would enable annual payments of \$2,500 each. The amount could be paid in monthly installments.

The cap on annual hours would trigger a claw back of \$18.21 an hour (the median wage) up to the total of \$2,500 for hours worked annually in excess of 1700. The structure of the stimulus package would give an incentive for full-time employees to work a shorter workweek or to take more vacation time. It would give an income boost to part-time and low-wage employees.

The potential number of hours released back into the job market by the work-time reduction would allow for the creation of approximately six million new full-time jobs (assuming job creation of about 45% of the arithmetically possible effect).

EUROPEAN UNION: BACK TO THE 48 HOUR WORKING WEEK? NOT SO FAST.

We were delighted to recently receive an expression of support for our work from the Greek organization G700, which is working to improve the lives of young people in Greece. They sent us this article:

By Thanassis Gouglas

G700, <http://g700.blogspot.com>

On 17 December 2008 the European Parliament voted to scrap national opt-outs to the 1993 Working Time Directive and enforce an EU-wide maximum working week of 48 hours, in open defiance of a group of member states led by the UK.

Working time has been a long-standing issue in the EU. The 1993 Working Time Directive stipulates that workers must not work more than an average of 48 hours a week, calculated over any four-month period. However it allows for a broad interpretation since social partners are able to agree on 'flexible arrangements'

if granted approval by the employer. This means that workers could effectively put in up to 60-65 hours per week. The clause was one of the UK government's main demands, while Spain and other nations lobbied heavily against it, followed by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), national Trade Unions, NGO's promoting worker's rights and netroots activists like our organization, Generation 700 Euros –G700 from Greece.

During the nineties, following a number of European Court of Justice Rulings, it was made clear that the 1993 Directive had to be revised. The European Commission presented its proposal for a revised directive in May 2004, but member states only managed to reach a compromise on the issue in June 2008 by strengthening the institutional framework for wide national opt-outs from the agreed EU-wide 48-hour working week. The scene was then set for the European Parliament to take action.

The European Parliament's employment committee rejected the compromise at first reading on 20 October 2008, demanding that opt-outs must lapse three years after the directive's entry into force. This position, which upholds the 48-hour working week and recommends the abolition of all exceptions, was on 17 December upheld by an absolute majority in the European Parliament.

This was a **great victory** for the European Parliament, hailed by the Trade Unions, NGO's and netroots activists like G700, who lobbied hard in favor of strengthening safeguards of the 48 hour working week within the EU.

Our organization's position on the issue has been that a 60 to 65 hour working week might be a legitimate right for business owners as well as a matter of free choice for CEOs, but it must not be forced down the throat as common working practice for the majority of European workers. And this is what's happening through the generalization backed by institutional power, of national opt-out clauses.

So, is Europe back to the 48 hour week?

Is Europe leading the way for the establishment of a new working culture placing emphasis on life balance?

Far from it. In response to the EU Parliament's decision, national governments and the Commission maintained their position that certain opt-outs should be allowed. What did happen in Europe in December is the latest step in a complex negotiation between the European Parliament and the EU Member States. The issue is expected to be addressed by a conciliation committee in early 2009.

Though Parliament enters negotiations from a point of strength it will face a mounting challenge by the opposing camp, which favors the opt-out on the ground that it increases flexibility in labor markets, particularly in difficult economic times.

However this argument has no economic rationale. In times of slowing growth and recession, when demand is not big enough to make use of all available productive capabilities in the economy, the last economic policy priority is allowing longer hours of work. What Europe really needs in order to deal with the coming global slump is to make better use of its knowledge worker capital, deal with the credit crunch, expand micro-credit for small and medium sized business, cut down on consumption excesses, redirect investments on infrastructure (especially to the South and the East) as well as the environment, and create a new market ethos. Europe as well as the US, is in urgent need of a paradigm shift on many fronts. Working time is most definitely a serious one.

THE BEAR DREAM

By Alasdair Logie

Dear TBYT

I would like to share a story with your readers - a dream that a patient of mine had. Here it is in his own words followed by my interpretation.

"I am driving to work when I see a huge bear standing next to my office building! He must be 300 feet tall and he rips off the roof and scoops out a great paw full of honey!

"My co-workers did not seem to be bothered –they buzz around the entrance of the building, and I suddenly realize that the line of office buildings is really just a row of hives and I am a bee!!

The dream gets even crazier as I wriggle through the opening at the base of this great box and make my way up to my little cubicle on the 30th floor. I am just another drone bee slaving away in my little hexagonal cell, making honey for some for some queen bee that I never see. Every quarter this great big bear takes huge mouthfuls of our precious produce!"

The dream gets stranger because then I see a beautiful butterfly fluttering past my office window. It doesn't need to store honey in a hive – it just drinks its fill of sweet nectar and then flutters away!

I sit at my window and marvel at this insect which seems so much more content with its lot! When it turns and smiles at me I realize it is my Uncle Billy – that's when I wake up!"

I don't usually interpret dreams, but I knew my patient was stressed by the amount of time he often spends in a stress-filled office. He often feels that his work is pointless but he is trapped there and can't escape.

The bear represents the owner of his company who takes a huge salary and his lavish spending seems like such a waste of resources. Just like a bear, the owner can consume more in a mouthful than a worker bee can make in a lifetime, which must add to the frustration!

On further questioning, I found the reason for the butterfly– my patient had just visited his uncle who runs his own carpentry business in the country. He had often envied his relaxed life and fulfilling work in contrast to his hectic and futile office job. Although the uncle is not as financially secure, he makes enough for himself and enjoys relative freedom.

After many sessions my patient decided to quit his city job and join his uncle in the country. I never heard from him again and can only hope that he found a place to stretch his wings!!

I often use this analogy to help people who are stuck in the office life make that leap into the 'cottage industries'. I do hope that this simple hive analogy can help any of your readers.

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HAPPENINGS

In Japan, promoters of a simpler life now celebrate an event called CANDLE NIGHT:

CANDLE NIGHT

By Junko Edahiro

"Candle Night" is a cultural movement to encourage people to spend some quality time with their loved ones and friends in more natural light, away from everyday life and artificial lighting. "Candle Night" can offer people time to think about what really matters to them during quiet and quality time in the candlelight, something all of us tend to forget in our busy everyday lives. We hope it will eventually lead us to long-term solutions to current problems and give us a chance to overcome our "economic supremacy." Even though lighting candles may emit small amounts of CO₂, we believe the benefits of the Candle Night activities are valuable to our societies and our futures.

Junko Edahiro is an environmental journalist, and Co-Chief Executive of Japan for Sustainability

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IN THE NEWS

Hi Take Back Your Time,

I'm a journalist who has written about Time Day from time to time (and even spoken with you I think). I thought you (and your listserv members) might be interested in this blog post about recent research on maternity leave that I just put up in which I link to you and use one of your awesome poster graphics.

<http://www.babble.com/CS/blogs/strollerderby/archive/2009/01/08/planning-to-work-until-the-first-contraction-plan-for-surgery.aspx>

Best,

Miriam Axel-Lute
Writer & Editor
www.mjoy.org

And here is a great story about us: TIME TO PLANT SEEDS from the Progressive magazine:

<http://www.progressive.org/mag/wxld020309.html>

Here's a great piece from the New York Times proposing shorter work time.

ARE CUTS IN HOURS AND PAY AN ALTERNATIVE TO MASS LAYOFFS?

By Adam Cohen

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/06/opinion/06sat4.html>

<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empst.pdf>

Weekly Hours (Establishment Survey Data)

In December, the average workweek for production and non-supervisory workers on private non-farm payrolls fell by 0.2 hour to 33.3 hours, seasonally adjusted - the lowest level on record for the series, which began in 1964. The manufacturing workweek, at 39.9 hours, declined by 0.4 hour over the month, and factory overtime, at 3.0 hours, declined by 0.3 hour. The index of aggregate weekly hours of production and non-

supervisory workers on private non-farm payrolls fell by 1.1 percent in December and 4.0 percent since peaking in December 2007. The manufacturing index declined by 2.4 percent over the month.

OTHER ARTICLES

December 27, 2008

WHY NOT START YOUR WEEKEND ON WEDNESDAY?

By Tim Harford

<http://www.slate.com/id/2207406/>

December 26, 2008

DOWNSIZING INTO EFFECTIVENESS

By Martin G. Evans Hugh P. Gunz R. Michael Jalland

http://www.projo.com/opinion/contributors/content/CT_evans26_12-26-08_LBCLUL6_v14.3e30965.html

December 24, 2008

HOW WE CAN LIVE WITH LESS AND STILL FEEL RICH

By [David Villano](#)

http://www.alternet.org/story/114966/how_we_can_live_with_less_and_still_feel_rich/

December 11, 2008

LIFE AFTER THE ECONOMIC COLLAPSE: HOW HAVING LESS WILL MAKE US HAPPIER

By Sarah van Gelder and Doug Pibel

http://www.alternet.org/story/111802/life_after_the_economic_collapse%3A_how_having_less_will_make_us_happier/?page=2

December 6, 2008

AMERICANS ARE CRAZY WORKAHOLICS -- IT'S TIME WE BROUGHT MORE BALANCE TO OUR LIVES

By Arianna Huffington

<http://www.alternet.org/workplace/110490/>

Link to article carried on AlterNet. Brief commentary on American attitudes toward overwork. Comments following article are interesting as well.

November 28, 2008

WASHINGTON POST ARTICLE MENTIONS COMING BATTLE OVER WORKPLACE REGULATIONS, INCLUDING FAMILY LEAVE.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/27/AR2008112702013_pf.html

November 14, 2008

NEW FMLA REGULATIONS OFFER BAD NEWS FOR WORKERS, GOOD OR MILITARY FAMILIES

http://www.nationalpartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=newsroom_pr_PressRelease_081114

November 5, 2008

MILWAUKEE BECOMES THIRD CITY IN U.S. TO GUARANTEE PAID SICK DAYS)

http://www.nationalpartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=newsroom_pr_PressRelease_081105&AddInterest=1341

November 15, 2008

RULE ALLOWS MORE TIME OFF FOR FAMILIES OF INJURED TROOPS (Washington Post,)

www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/14/AR2008111403506.html

FAMILY LEAVE RULES TIGHTEN; MILITARY FAMILIES ELIGIBLE (USA Today,)

www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2008-11-13-family-leave-rules_N.htm

November 13, 2008

LABOR DEPARTMENT FINALIZES NEW FAMILY LEAVE RULES (The Associated Press)

www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5il07geuyDPnjBs2yPoGDkC-6hhyAD94EC8600

STEVE JOBS GETS HIS PRIORITIES RIGHT

eWeek - New York, NY

More than enough time. There's a saying that you can always get more money. But the same doesn't apply to time. You can't **take back time**. ...

http://blogs.eweek.com/applewatch/content/corporate/steve_jobs_sets_his_priorities_right.html

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YOUR LETTERS

From Illinois:

Will the mandatory three week vacation be put to a vote this year with the new administration? I hope so. I started my current job two years ago and will have to wait until year seven before I get an additional week off. This is only my third employer in the last 13 years. I only received two weeks with each them. By the time I reach my seventh year with my current employer I will have worked 17 years only to receive two weeks a year. I have two kids and to only get two weeks off per year...well, I'm burnt. If those kids get sick five times in one year or my daycare closes for a week I have one week left for myself or for a family vacation that doesn't even count if I get sick one or two times a year. If I get sick I have to go to work because I need to save my time for my kids. I really hope you can get something passed this year.

From New York:

There's a huge problem of forced overtime in this country, especially among salaried professionals. The assumption is that, since salaried professionals tend to get paid more, they should work more hours and thus heroically risk their health for their jobs. My husband was working into his evenings and weekends at a very intense pace and getting exhausted. When he first spoke out about the forced overwork situation, his boss immediately gave him a poor performance review that stated that he wasn't "doing enough." This was his ONLY performance review in over three years there, so obviously there really wasn't a performance problem (until he spoke up). He was scared into silence for a while and continued working at an even more frenetic pace, his workdays eventually consistently extending into weekends. The employer then stopped filling vacant positions in my husband's department and instead gave him the work! Eventually, my husband collapsed into exhaustion, burnout and depression, and we were forced to confront the employer about the public health hazard of chronic forced overwork. Their response was to fire my husband immediately for "performance reasons," leaving us with even more stress and no health insurance! It seems to me that chronic forced overwork should be a recognized and controlled workplace health hazard, just like a toxin, because it truly has the same effect---and one that is often lasting and sometimes even deadly. My once very mentally healthy husband is now on antidepressant and anti-anxiety medications and having a very hard time transitioning back to work. Keep up the great work!

From Massachusetts:

I'm from the Boston area and would be interested in helping to make this (a paid vacation law) come to light here in the Northeast ... Any suggestions would be very helpful ... getting signatures in my area and so on and so on ... I am not employed but am computer and people ready ... I'm a 57 year old male and this sparks my interest for my children as well as all the children in the USA. We want change, and it's time to make change ... Just talking to a few family members, they thought a law like that would be great but did [believe] if a law was to be passed for 40 per week then most of the big businesses would just hire part-time help to get around it ... my thought should cover all employees, part-time or full-time ... like 30 days + holidays for full-time and 15 days + holidays for part-time ... Your thought?

From California:

I wanted to bring to your attention a John Muir quote regarding the need for "compulsory recreation," as I thought it might be helpful to you. Please see page 182 of the new John Muir biography, *A Passion For Nature The Life of John Muir*, by Dr. Donald Worster (extracted passages below are as they appear in the book):

"We work too much and rest too little," he [Muir] declared. "You cannot leave your business? Yes, but you *will* leave it." Killed by overwork, you will end up in the hearse of "the jolly undertaker." Work hard at your urban job, Muir was telling his readers, but allow time each year -- as he was doing -- for "Nature's rest cure." He even advocated a "law of rest," forcing people to lay down their pens and ledgers as he was doing for weeks and months at a time. "Compulsory education may be good; compulsory recreation may be better." In the year 1876, which marked the nation's one-hundredth birthday, he proposed a new kind of "Centennial

freedom." Set free the many urban slaves who are "duty bound, business bound." Give every person enough leisure to go into nature: "men, women and children of every creed and color, from every nation under the sun," farmers, businessmen, lawyers, scientists, even "wealthy and elegant loafers trying to escape from themselves."

From Indiana:

I totally agree with your philosophy. I work 15 hours a week, and my life has never been better. I have time to read, pray, exercise, and think about and practice environmental sustainability. I have time to walk to work, and I have time to focus on my health and spirituality. Something I never had when I worked full time. However, the only problem with my situation is that I have to be declared disabled and must take a drug that I don't think is good for me. I became disabled from being stressed out from working full-time in the past. Now, I am much healthier and clearer thinking than I ever was before, because I have more time to think, write, and learn. I believe the system should make it easier for people to work part-time if they wish, and I believe it would be better for everyone if they were allowed. With this in mind, I was wondering if you ever thought about sending group e-mailings from supporters to persuade lawmakers into changing the laws. I know that environmental groups, and the Brady campaign do this, and I noticed that things are swinging in their direction. They usually write something for supporters to send allowing them to use their own words if they want. I just sent a \$25.00 donation for the year-end to help your cause. Thanks for what you do.

From Pennsylvania:

Your organization is wonderful, I support what you are doing fully and I try to spread the word and direct others to your site. I was speaking on the phone to a friend of mine in England and I said to him that Europeans had about 9 weeks more of time off than Americans did a year. He said "how can that be, we only get five weeks of vacation." HA! If you have some ideas of where to put posters, please let me know and I will print bunches and put them about where I live.

From England:

I came across your web site as I was searching under the President elect Obama's agenda list; I see on his web site under "Family" that there is no wording guaranteeing mandatory vacation time off through out the year for employees, only mandatory seven sick days (at which point a Doctor's note will be required). Now that Obama is coming into office with a majority of Democrats in Congress - where does the mandatory vacation time stand? Has a bill been raised or will it be raised in the new Congress to get this into law? I see on your web site that you guys have been pushing this for years and it seems as though it hasn't gone any place. I work in the accounting / finance private sector and have worked for many companies - most of which offered NO vacation time. I worked for one company that required mandatory 12 to 13 hours per day 6 days per week, no vacation, personal, sick or holiday time. I thought that would have been an isolated event, until I quit there and moved on and found myself working for another company that practiced the same procedures (after 3 months I quit). Since then, my wife and I have moved out of the United States to the UK as her job required her to do so....now here in the UK I get 30 vacation days off per year {25 required by law plus 5 days I'm allowed to purchase} and that's just Holiday time, then add another 8 bank holiday's on top of that, along with unlimited sick...however no personal is allowed. But good times for us here in Europe are coming to an end...as we will be moving back to the States come next summer. And with that said - I will be back working for another company (someplace) working 12 hours per day with no available time off for family as we have 2 small children. With President elect Obama and the new Congress come Jan 20th - if no one can get this past with them in office, then it will never happen. Now is the best chance! However, if I may make a suggestion after reading the "Minimum Leave Protection, Family Bonding and Personal Well-Being Act of 2007". I do see a flaw here and I'm not sure where this bill is currently at in Congress OR who designed the wording. The flaw I see is "after one year". This bill will protect companies by employing individuals like myself who work 12 hours per day, mostly 6 days per week - then once that year is almost up they will

terminate and simply replace the employee. It's that simple. The bill needs to be worded that once three months of full time employment has been reached (like here in the UK) - the mandatory vacation time kicks in. And even more importantly the bill needs to be further read that it also protects contract (temp) workers as well (just like here in the UK). Otherwise every company out there will turn to temporary personnel to fill their needs without the need to offer vacation time. And lastly, the bill is pushing for 3 weeks mandatory vacation time. Well, after it makes it way through Congress and the lobbyist get through with it, **GUARANTEED** that will shrink down to 2 weeks, **if that**. I would highly suggest pushing 4 weeks and be lucky that 3 weeks makes it. I haven't read the act entirely - but it does need to include revised wording like I've mentioned. You have my support and I hope you (or someone) can get the proper bill raised in the House and get your Representatives to push it through.

From Colorado:

I really respect your work. I'm sure you saw this in the news this week, but the linked article describes an effort on the part of businesses in Japan to promote shorter workdays, in order to slow the country's declining birthrates. The issue should reverberate in the United States and Europe as well, where birthrates are below replacement levels in many areas. Not only is it a quality of life issue when couples are too tired to have sex, but especially amid the current environment of deficit spending, fewer young workers in the future only amplifies the looming crisis of Social Security and other entitlement programs. Thanks for the great November newsletter!

Keidanren Tells Japan's Salarymen to Work Less, Have More Kids

http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=email_en&refer=home&sid=a6qq53CVLzUg

From Pennsylvania:

I am very interested in seeing your campaign be successful in its push for fair workplace practices with regard to leave in the workplace. Given the upcoming election, more attention needs to be brought to the issue. I have a few suggestions that may help in this regard.

The first would be to add a link to you site that would allow people to directly petition their representatives. As you know people have very little time to spare looking into these things themselves so we need to make it easy for them. An example of what I am suggesting can be found on the site below. If you scroll down to the bottom, you will see that one can enter their zip code and it will automatically set up a form to send to the appropriate representatives.

<http://www.capwiz.com/now/issues/alert/?alertid=9818291&type=CO#action>

I also believe that if people knew how the US compares to other countries and what the government provides to themselves, they would be outraged that they are given so little. We should take advantage of the ability to reach people through chain emails. I started one and have pasted the contents below as an example. My thought is that if your site had the means of allowing a visitor to click on a link that would automatically set up an email with similar content, they could send the email to all of their friends. The key is that the email must provide a direct link to people's government officials so it is EASY to make their stance known. I have received so many chain emails about all types of nonsense, so clearly people are willing to keep them going. With this issue being so close to many people's hearts, I am certain it would gain a life of its own. We need to let people know that they are not powerless. We also need to let our representatives know that we expect them to support what we, as citizens feel we deserve. I sincerely hope that you are able to support some of these suggestions. I truly believe they can make a difference.

Subject: Family Values is not a sound bite!

AMERICANS SHOULD HAVE THE SAME RIGHTS AS PEOPLE DO IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Over the years I have been inundated with chain email for all kinds of nonsense. This is the first time I have ever written one. Even if this does not inspire you to action, just forward it on in hopes that if enough focus can be brought to this issue in the upcoming election, we may get the fair work conditions we deserve.

Like all of you, I have found that I just don't have enough time to get the things I need done and still have time with my family. I battle the guilt of not having time with my family against having the financial stability to support them. Our politicians talk about "family values" but the truth is that the root of the problem is that you cannot have family values if the family is never given any time to bond. It is at the root of all our social issues. Parents would have more time to educate. Parents would have more time to be involved in their children's lives maybe preventing the proliferation of gangs and increase in Columbine-like incidents. I was driven to research the problem and what I found was shocking, saddening and depressing.

I think if more people knew the state of our society in America, people would rise up and demand fair treatment. Unfortunately those in power are so far out of touch with their flexible hours and government benefits, that they do not have an interest in correcting this terrible wrong. And, of course, corporate America believes it would cost them too much, though upper management are offered much better vacation packages than the grunt worker.

I am hoping to create a grassroots movement to pressure our government to give us the same benefits they have. Many of you may believe it is too late to help you, but think about your children. Don't you want them to grow up in a country where they will be treated as well as the citizens of Paraguay or Costa Rica

What can you do??

Write you representatives:

Go to <http://www.house.gov/> and <http://www.senate.gov/> and find your representative and senators email address. Email them with the subject "Family Values is not just a sound bite". Tell them you expect them to introduce or support legislation to achieve mandatory paid vacation on par with other developed nations. Tell them you expect them to support the maternity leave bill the benefits all Americans, not just those in federal jobs. You can forward this email or tell them your own personal feelings about the situation in this country.

Support Action Groups like:

<http://www.worktolive.info/>
www.timeday.org

Sign up for newsletters and support efforts:

<http://www.capwiz.com/now/issues/alert/?alertid=9818291&type=CO> This site has a direct ink to petition your representatives to support legislation expanding the family leave act, to require equitable benefits to part time employees, paid leave for maternity and caregiving, funding for after school programs, etc.

Here are the laws regarding vacation time by country:

- **Argentina:** 14 calendar days (from 0 to 5 years seniority), 21 calendar days (from 5 to 10), 28 calendar days (from 10 to 20) and 35 calendar days (from 20)

- **Australia:** As of 27 March 2006, 20 work days (4 weeks). 2 weeks can be "sold" to employer. Additional Long service leave is also payable. 10 public holidays as well are payable to employees.
- **Austria:** 5 weeks
- **The Bahamas:** 14 days after 1 year employment, 21 days after 5 years employment
- **Belgium:** 20 days, premium pay
- **Brazil:** 30 consecutive days, of which 10 can be sold back to the employer
- **Bulgaria:** minimum 20 working days
- **Canada:** Determined by provincial law. 10-15 working days depending on province. In addition, 10-12 public holidays depending on province.
- **Chile:** 15 working days
- **Colombia:** 15 working days for every year, vacations can be accumulated for up to 4 years (up to 60 working days of vacations)
- **Costa Rica:** 2 weeks after 1 year employment.
- **China:** Not required - this is incorrect. while complicated by complex fluid laws there is a minimum of 20 days per year.
- **Croatia:** 18 working days
- **Czech Republic:** 4 weeks
- **Colombia:** 14 days
- **Denmark:** 6 weeks, of which 5 days can be "sold" back to the employer - *omsorgsdage (carer's leave)*.
- **Dominican Republic:** 14 work days after one year employment, 20 work days after 5 years employment.
- **Estonia:** 28 calendar days
- **European Union:** 4 weeks, more in some countries
- **Ecuador:** 14 days
- **Finland:** 35 days
- **France:** 5 weeks^[1] (+ 2 weeks of RTT (Reduction du Temps de Travail, in English : Reduction of Working Time) according to the contract)
- **Germany:** 4 weeks, i.e. 24 "workable" days based on a six day week (Mon - Sat). Normal work-week is Mo-Fr; plus 9 to 13 bank holidays; plus sick, pregnancy, mothership and personal leave
- **Greece:** 20 working days or more depending of the years in the company
- **Hong Kong:** 7 days
- **Hungary:** 20 working days
- **Ireland:** 20 days, plus 9 public holidays
- **India:** 60 Days
- **Israel:** 14 days
- **Italy:** 20-32 working days (exact amount depends on contract details) plus 12 public holidays
- **Japan:** including sick leave: 18 days paid time off; officially, five weeks (in reaction to the karoshi problem)
- **Korea, South:** 10 working days
- **Latvia:** 4 weeks
- **Malaysia:** Starts at 8 days for first 2 years employment with an employer. Increases to 12 days for between 2 and 5 years employment and 16 days for 5 or more years. Plus about 14 public holidays (depends on state).
- **Mexico:** 7 days
- **Netherlands:** 4 weeks
- **New Zealand:** 4 weeks as of April 1, 2007
- **Norway:** 25 working days
- **Paraguay:** 14 days
- **Peru:** 14 days
- **Poland:** 20 business days, 26 business days after 10 years of employment
- **Portugal:** 22 working days, up to 25 without work absences in previous year.

- **Puerto Rico:** 15 days
- **Romania:** minimum 21 working days
- **Russia:** 28 calendar days[2]
- **Saudi Arabia:** 15 days
- **Serbia:** 20 working days minimum + 1 day extra for every 2 years of service (this extra is optional, employer can choose not to do that)
- **Singapore:** 7 days
- **Slovakia:** 20 days, 25 days after 15 years of employment
- **South Africa:** 21 consecutive days
- **Spain:** 30 calendar days
- **Sweden:** 25-32 working days, depending on age
- **Switzerland:** 28 calendar days (= 20 work days)
- **Taiwan:** 7 days
- **Turkey:** 12 work days
- **Tunisia:** 30 work days
- **Ukraine:** 24 calendar days
- **United Kingdom:** 4 working weeks, with no additional entitlement for bank holidays. Increases to 4.8 weeks from 1st October 2007, and to 5.6 weeks from 1st April 2009.[3]
- **United States:** none[4]
- **Uruguay:** 14 days
- **Venezuela:** 15 paid days
- **Vietnam:** 10 working days.

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