



# TAKE BACK YOUR TIME

OCTOBER 24 WWW.TIMEDAY.ORG

## NEWSLETTER - November/December 2008

### CONTENTS:

- Letter from the Executive Director – John de Graaf
- Letter from the Editor – Kelley Smith
- From our Board Members
  - MY AMERICAN VISION: A SHORTER WORK-TIME JUBILEE
- Feature Articles
  - SLOWING DOWN WHILE SHE GROWS SO FAST
  - HOW I TOOK BACK MY TIME
  - WHY AREN'T WE SUSTAINABLE?
- Happenings
- In The News
- Your Letters

---

---

### LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - JOHN DE GRAAF

Well, another TAKE BACK YOUR TIME DAY has passed, our sixth since the organization was founded. TAKE BACK YOUR TIME events, like ours in Seattle, were small this year, in part due to all the activity around our Presidential election. We are very hopeful that the new administration will take time and work/life balance issues seriously. Michelle Obama has indicated that work/life balance is a key concern of hers. We are ready to help out in any way we can.

As unemployment rates climb, it's time for our political leaders to "think outside the box" and propose ways of shortening working hours some to create more jobs for people. A four-day, 32 hour week is something they should certainly look into. One way to do it would be to go to an official 4-day, 9 hour week for those workers who want to do that, with no loss in pay, then offer 8 hour days with a reduction of 10% in salaries. Workers would be putting in 20% less time than they do now with a 40 hour work week, but they would be more productive during those hours. More jobs would also be opened up.

Adding vacation time and sick days to this would improve Americans' health and cut down on health care costs—a huge issue as President Obama moves toward universal health care, one of his priority goals.

There are some great pieces to read in this newsletter. I especially recommend two from former Canadian board members of TAKE BACK YOUR TIME. Tom Walker provides some great historical perspective on the idea of reducing working hours and Isabelle Gingras writes about what a blessing Canada's family leave law has been for her in taking

care of her infant daughter. President-elect Obama has pledged to use federal funds in assisting states to create family leave laws, a priority issue for TAKE BACK YOUR TIME. We could learn a lot from the Canadians about this.

We've had a lot written about us in the press this past month! We've collected some of the excellent stories and opinion pieces and you can read them by clicking to them here in the newsletter. There is really a lot of media interest in our vacation campaign!

One exciting thing about our recent election was seeing the enthusiasm of people all over the world for our new President. They are eager to work with us again and we should be willing to learn from them, especially about work/life balance policy.

Recently, I watched pollster Frank Luntz speak to the Republican governors' conference. Luntz was very clear, as he has been before, that his polling and focus groups show that the number one priority for American women is "time". While "money" is the top priority for men, time isn't far behind at number two. Luntz admonished the Republican governors to take the time issue seriously. I certainly hope both major parties will do so!

### **PLEASE MAKE A DONATION TO TAKE BACK YOUR TIME TODAY!**

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, TAKE BACK YOUR TIME is delighted to be working with the American Resort Development Association on their "Take two weeks and call me in the morning" campaign to encourage more vacation time for Americans. We also gratefully acknowledge ARDA's financial contribution to our organization. It is instrumental in helping us through very lean times. But we really need your help. PLEASE consider TAKE BACK YOUR TIME in your holiday giving this year. We are a non-profit and all donations are tax deductible! You can donate online:



Or send checks made out to CRESP/TAKE BACK YOUR TIME to TAKE BACK YOUR TIME, PO BOX 19862, Seattle, WA 98109.

Thanks to Go South Adventures for a Take Back Your Time Day donation to our organization. Check out Go South for trips to Patagonia, the Galapagos, Machu Picchu and other South American destinations!

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS. WE'LL BE BACK TO YOU IN JANUARY!!! Do write to us!**

[Table of Contents](#)

---

## **LETTER FROM THE EDITOR - KELLEY SMITH**

In the course of some conversations with friends, a couple of old phrases have come to mind lately. One is "conspicuous consumption." First coined by Thorstein Veblen, this referred to our tendency to own things-mostly for a status symbol. Veblen believed the "lower classes" attempted to emulate the consumption behavior of their betters. Now the phrase does not seem to carry the social-class baggage that Veblen originally discussed. We all hear the phrase from time to time, and we all seem to know it when we see it!

Another old favorite is "service economy." In the 80's and 90's, much business literature touted services as the wave of the future. Lose your manufacturing job? Not to worry! The service economy will find a place for you. And you can always start your own business, and incidentally, how about a service business? Thus, anyone whose manufacturing job moved offshore was assured of finding a profitable niche in the franchised world of dog-walking, toenail-painting, and car-washing.

Indeed, some services have become profitable business niches. Yet, I sometimes try to wrap my brain around this question-who is it that needs all these services? How did we become a nation of people who can't bathe our dogs, plan

birthday parties, or cook our meals? Are we all completely inept at cleaning house? A new business in a nearby suburb will now plan and host a birthday party for your dog! I'm not making this up. If you just can't get your act together to plan that special occasion for your four-footed friend, with a simple swipe of your debit or credit card, your canine cutie can have his day in the sun with several friends! Can't we do anything for ourselves anymore?

There's another historical trend that precedes the service economy. When women began to enter the workforce (starting in the 70's and continuing) we became unable to attend to our pets and toenails because of the time crunch. Moms, who had unselfishly performed countless "services" for their families were no longer available to the extent they had been. To a business looking for profits, this was a ticket to prosperity. And to weary and sometimes underappreciated moms, paying someone to cook, clean, or mow the lawn seemed appealing. Being able to pay someone else to take over less desirable jobs became a status symbol in itself.

There is no shame in hiring someone to do chores or in working in the service industry for that matter. But does it seem this is out of control? Does it seem conspicuous services (and thus those service jobs) are the first thing to go when budgets get a little tight? When do services become a new form of conspicuous consumption? And how big is the chunk of our paycheck that must go to pay for these services? Is it a choice to hire a lawn service or is it an act of desperation because of overwork? And what if we (women and men alike) would like the freedom to decide whether or not to purchase services or to spend a few less hours at the office, leaving time for responsibilities at home?

Good questions for times like these.

[Table of Contents](#)

---

## From Our Board Members

### MY AMERICAN VISION: A SHORTER WORK-TIME JUBILEE

By Tom Walker

Former TAKE BACK YOUR TIME board member from Vancouver, Canada

On November 2, 1865 – one month before the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, abolishing slavery – the great antislavery activist and orator, Wendell Phillips, proclaimed /his/ American vision from the platform of Faneuil Hall in Boston:

"Today one of your sons is born. He lies in his cradle as the child of a man without means, with a little education, and with less leisure. The favored child of the capitalist is borne up by every circumstance, as on the eagle's wings. The problem of today is how to make the chances of the two as equal as possible; and before this movement stops, every child born in America must have an equal chance in life."

The election of President Obama symbolizes the progress made in a century and a half toward fulfilling that vision. There is still far to go, though, before every child born in America has that equal chance in life. Wendell Phillips's devotion to the cause of labor can show the way – the "more American way."

In his Boston speech, Phillips addressed the Boston Eight-Hour League, which advocated adoption of an eight-hour working day. Seventy-three years later, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 made the eight-hour day and the 40-hour workweek the law of the land. Another 70 years have passed since passage of the FLSA but the standard workweek remains frozen at 40 hours despite immense improvements in productivity and profound demographic shifts in labor-force participation.

The great eight-hour movement didn't aspire to an eight-hour day merely for its own sake or as the ultimate goal. Eight hours was envisioned as a step on the path to a higher ideal. More leisure would allow for education and uplift, which would lead to more effective citizenship and political participation. Through higher wages and lower unemployment, eight hours would bring about a more equitable distribution of the products of industry. Achievement of the eight hour day would inspire a movement for the six-hour day and, eventually, to industrial co-operation: " In this final arrangement, every man will combine in his own person the laborer and the capitalist." (n.b. While Phillips's usage

conformed to the old-fashioned convention of "men" and "sons", his colleagues in the Anti-Slavery Society and the Eight-Hour League included women's rights pioneers, Susan B. Anthony and Helen Cady Stanton).

The eight-hour theory articulated by Ira Steward, also an antislavery activist, was a uniquely American theory of social economy. It provided the philosophical foundation for the American Federation of Labor during its formative years. In the Depression of the 1930s, economist Dorothy W. Douglas considered the theory to be "strangely apposite" to the economic problems of that time. Historian Lawrence Glickman credited the eight-hour theorists with establishing the concepts of a living wage and a high standard of living for working people.

Ironically, in the 1930s big-business opponents of the Roosevelt New Deal hijacked Wendell Phillips's terminology of the better, nobler, "more American way." On 60,000 billboards erected across the country, the National Association of Manufacturers claimed credit for the "World's Highest Standard of Living", "World's Highest Wages" and "World's Shortest Hours of Work." A decade later, their Republican allies in Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act to facilitate rolling back those higher wages and shorter hours.

A century ago, Sydney J. Chapman, a star pupil of one of the founders of modern neoclassical economics, Alfred Marshall, presented his theory of the hours of labor. That theory overturned what Lionel Robbins called "the naïve assumption that the connection between hours and output is one of direct variation." Coincidentally, it confirmed key elements of the theory proposed by the Boston machinist, Ira Steward. In the 1940s, economist John Maynard Keynes argued that reducing the hours of work was one of three ingredients of a cure for unemployment and, furthermore, that it was the "ultimate" cure.

Economists today, though, shun discussion of shorter hours like the plague. They disparage policies for reduced working time as being based on an imaginary "lump-of-labor fallacy." Few of them have heard of Ira Steward's theory or have any idea that respected economists like Sydney Chapman, John Maynard Keynes or John R. Commons also supported progressively reducing the hours of work. A veil of ignorance and arrogance has descended in textbook economics over the issue of the hours of work. Is it any wonder then, that in the face of the greatest economic challenge since the depression, economists can think of nothing better than to call for yet another fiscal stimulus package, yet another interest rate cut and yet more bailouts of banks and corporations?

It is unrealistic to think that the Obama administration would consider implementing a policy of reducing the hours of work in the absence of strong popular support for such an action. It would be my hope, though, that the new administration could at least research the notion and review, with an open mind, the historical and economic case for shorter working time. Then, as the same-old, same-old economic policies of fiscal stimulus, interest rate cuts and bailouts prove their futility – which they will – and as unemployment continues to mount month after month, an in-depth understanding of the "strangely apposite" theories of Ira Steward and Sydney Chapman might ultimately prove useful in formulating substantive, innovative responses to the economic emergency.

Inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia is the Bible verse, "Proclaim LIBERTY throughout all the Land unto all the inhabitants thereof." The phrase comes from Leviticus 25:10 in the Old Testament and refers to the ancient custom of the Jubilee year in which slaves were freed and land returned to former occupants who had lost it through indebtedness. Abolitionists in the 1830s adopted it as their slogan and gave the bell its current name. In 1868, when Congress passed a law establishing an eight-hour day for laborers, mechanics and other workers in federal government employment, it was hailed as a "Jubilee of Labor."

My American vision foresees resuming the progressive reduction of the hours of work – with its associated increases in leisure and wages and decreases in unemployment and insecurity, as the surest way to "Proclaim LIBERTY throughout all the Land unto all the inhabitants thereof" and to ensure that "every child born in America must have an equal chance in life."

[Table of Contents](#)

---

## FEATURE ARTICLES

### SLOWING DOWN WHILE SHE GROWS SO FAST

By Isabelle Gingras  
Former TAKE BACK YOUR TIME board member from Montreal, Quebec

Through the monitor, I hear her joyous babbles. Dawn has entered her room and she greets this new day with enthusiasm. I laboriously get out of bed to pick up my 8-month old. She smiles widely at my sight, unaware that the new tooth she displays means that mommy has gotten little sleep.

No matter. There is no need to rush. I'm not going anywhere. I bring her to my bed and together, for long moments, we cuddle, tickle each other, play, laugh. We watch the fierce yellow glow of the autumn sun pierce through a dark grey sky, firing up the red maple trees across the street. And we cuddle some more. We do this every morning. Then, when we're ready, we head for breakfast.

No need to rush... When we're ready...

Life, for the past eight months, has surely been busy. But at the same time, it has been deliciously slowed down to the pace of my tiny buddy. With a lot of spare time to figure out why dust floats in midair and bubbles burst when they touch the grass. Time to smile and pour into each other's eyes, without anywhere to go or anything else to do. Time for the big stuff like going to the beach or riding the train. And the small stuff, like learning how to hold teddy bear while falling asleep.

Never in my life had time seemed more precious. Never had each day counted more, weighing heavy in delightful memories, proudly overcome obstacles, and absolute tenderness. We slowed down to the pace of observing wrinkles on fingers and napping close together.

Not for a moment do I regret extending my stay at home with Kim. I can't imagine later thinking, "Darn, I should have gone back to work sooner!" Every parent should have that opportunity. I am not making a judgment about how long mothers and fathers should stay home with their child after birth. I am well positioned to understand the complexity of this decision. It is multifaceted and highly personal. What I am advocating is choice. Every parent should have the choice to stay home with baby after birth for a reasonable length of time.

I am in luck. Living in Quebec means that maternity leave lasts for 18 weeks and 70% of the mother's income is covered by the Régime Québécois d'Assurance Parentale. Daddy gets his own paternity leave of 5 weeks, which also insures 70% of his income. Thereafter, we benefit from parental leave, which can be shared between the mother and the father. Parental leave is 7 weeks at 70% of the income of the parent benefiting from the leave, and another 25 weeks at 55%. All in all, I can stay home for a year and still get some money for diapers and pacifiers.

There is flexibility in the program. Parents can choose a shorter leave with a higher percentage of income replaced. A mother can also choose to start her leave up to 16 weeks before the birth of her child, if for example her pregnancy prevents her from working but her job is so precarious that she has no safety net from other governmental programs. Mothers also benefit from a full maternity leave if their pregnancy is interrupted after the 20<sup>th</sup> week (an earlier interruption allows for three weeks without pay). There is also a parental leave for adoptions (though shorter) and flexibility for parents whose newborn is hospitalized.

Upon their return to work, both parents are guaranteed not only their job but the position they had upon leaving, as well as the income, benefits, raises, and conditions they would have had and gained if they had kept working during the leave. Both salaried and non-salaried workers can benefit as long as they pay the contribution to the program in their income taxes. All income above \$2000 in the year preceding the birth is insured, up to a maximum of \$60,500.

The program varies by province and though the norms are good in the rest of Canada, Quebec definitely has the most generous leave from a financial standpoint, with the newest norms in place since 2006. As a result, Quebec's birth rate has increased by 7% in 2006 alone! Quebec is the only province with a leave specific for fathers and 56% of them have taken advantage of it in 2006 (11% take some parental leave in the rest of Canada).

Not only does this extended leave afford to spend time with the most precious being in our lives, it also helps us maintain sanity. Time means mommy can recover more quickly and healthily from the birth. It means daddy can bond early on and often with baby. It means baby is unencumbered by the pace of our working lives.

This time is not a luxury. It is simply humane. We must consider parental leave not a privilege but a right. Our children are not burdens on the system. They are the foundation of everything good that is to come our way in the future.

I look into Kim's big round eyes, so full of hope, anguish and excitement, and I wonder how I would explain to her that mommy has to leave for work today, not because she wants to but because she simply has no choice.

Instead, I breathe and relax. With an inviting smile, Kim hands me the rubber crab she's been chewing passionately.

Mommy, come, it is time to play.

**Table of Contents**

---

## **HOW I TOOK BACK MY TIME**

By Alisdair Logie

I took back my time the day I took a step back and viewed my life as if it were a picture hanging on a gallery wall. I was shocked to realize how little time I had spent painting the canvas and how much attention I had focused on the frame!

I spent nearly all of my time supporting my life – paying the bills, keeping a roof over my head etc. I had so little time to add in some color with hobbies, activities, family time, fun! My picture was all work and no play!

Yes we all need to earn those little green purchasing rectangles to live, but our work was supposed to maintain a life, not take center stage! So many people are living to work, instead of working to live!

I decided to focus more attention on my passions and add a little color to my life! I vowed to shift the focus of my time from spending it on Maintenance Tasks and try to increase my Goal Activities. I also vowed to cut all Waste out of the Time equation and it suddenly became a mathematical formula –  $T = G + M - W$  where Time = Goal + Maintenance ( - Waste).

I am fortunate to have a job that is flexible enough that I only get paid for the hours I put in. It has enabled me to work for as much as I need and then I do a very strange thing - I stop working! As soon as I have the proverbial wolf at the door, I do not spend any more energy chasing him into the forest – I simply enjoy my short life!

Most people keep working long after they need the money. Those that accumulate huge financial reserves are like those paintings with ornate golden frames hanging in private galleries with very little of interest on the canvas!

Others find ways of spending all those reserves they worked so hard to earn. They are like those that rush through the gallery not noticing the art around them as they spend all their money in the souvenir shop!

Both groups will look back over their short lives and morn all that time they wasted working so hard. Sure, frame up the details of your daily life, but don't let your paint dry out before you have committed some color to your canvas!

**Table of Contents**

---

## **WHY AREN'T WE SUSTAINABLE?**

By David Wann

If so many are willing to die for our country, why are we afraid to *live* for it, moderately and unselfishly? Why do we place a higher value on convenience, size, and speed than the well being of living things (including ourselves)? The many globally scaled challenges we now face will require major social and psychological adjustments, not just new technologies. We need to change the *patterns* of our lives (where we live, how we work, what we eat) not just the

pieces. Yet, cultural inertia and consumer euphoria perpetuate an unrealistic hope that our familiar way of life can continue without significant changes. If we just screw in some compact fluorescent bulbs and remember to take cloth bags to the grocery, maybe we can avoid the need to rethink our relationship with the Earth? Once we bring new technologies on line – such as plug-in hybrid vehicles, super-efficient buildings, and huge wind farms - we're there, right?

Not exactly. Certainly, these simple habit changes and brilliant technologies are urgently needed pieces of an emerging Restoration Economy, but they are not sufficient. Until we change the *direction* of our plug-and-play lifestyle, we'll continue to be an endangered as well as dangerous civilization. Each American now requires an average of thirty acres (roughly thirty football fields) of prime land and sea to satisfy both the needs and wants of our excessive lifestyle - a national total of roughly nine billion acres. Since this is more than three times the acreage of the United States, we'll inevitably have to bully other countries to continue our own absurd levels of consumption. Unless we decide, at last, to modify and moderate our story.

We can't change the realities of resource scarcity and natural limits so we must change ourselves instead. Consumer cultures like ours urgently need value-directed policies that reward efficiency and durability and penalize over-consumption (see the accompanying box). Too often, we don't issue guidelines bold enough to break bad habits. For example, between 1980 and 1990, mandated upgrades in automobile efficiency held transportation's share of oil consumption steady; but the pampered American psyche demanded larger and more powerful vehicles, erasing the efficiency gains and increasing oil demand, a major factor in rising gasoline prices.

Similarly, household appliances steadily became more efficient but those gains were literally overpowered when huge-screen TVs, computers, and Play Stations began to define what we do indoors. Electrical consumption in the average household is climbing beyond the capacity of roof-mounted solar electric systems, an otherwise very promising technology. The fact is, renewable energies like solar, wind, and geothermal *can* meet the needs of a moderate, no-waste economy, but not a careless, hyper-consumptive economy.

Since 1950, the average American home doubled in size; miles traveled per capita (on the road and in the air) more than tripled, and U.S. per capita consumption of energy-intensive meat increased by almost 60 percent. Since 1975, U.S. consumption of plastic-bottled water skyrocketed more than 2,000 percent, as Americans pursued a false symbol of health, stylishness, and purity. We can't become truly sustainable until we curb our appetites for energy hogs like throwaway packaging; expansive green lawns; suburbs-without stores, and airfreight shipping of produce. Simply finding substitutes for today's fuels and technologies won't break the ongoing fever of overproduction, overconsumption, and waste.

Only by rethinking and redefining words like "enough" and "success" can we steer our society in a sunnier direction. Congressman Dennis Kucinich recently suggested that status – a universal human need – should be based on *service*, not consumption. Adopting this suggestion as an unselfish social goal could change the very nature of the economic game we are so destructively playing.

Our ideal destination, a sustainable culture that delivers more satisfaction for fewer resources, will require slowing the metabolism of human civilization itself, for example, by improving the usefulness - sometimes questioning the very necessity - of manufactured goods. The overall goal is to produce goods and services the way bees produce honey, without harming the flower.

Historian Arnold Toynbee observed that civilizations that ultimately succeed follow a "law of progressive simplification," in which they become culturally richer but materially leaner. A good example is 18<sup>th</sup> century Japan, which shifted from an emphasis on material wealth to an abundance of time, relationships, experiences, nature, art, and design. Land was in short supply, forest resources were being depleted, and minerals such as gold, silver, and copper were also becoming scarce, so Japan adapted by developing a national ethic that centered on frugality. An attachment to material things was seen as demeaning, while the advancement of crafts and human knowledge were seen as lofty goals. Training and education in aesthetics and knowledge-based arts flourished, resulting in disciplines like fencing, martial arts, the tea ceremony, literature and art. Most people had access to basic education and health care, further enriching a culture that employed very few resources per "unit of happiness."

America is poised to make such an elegant transition under new leadership, as countries like Costa Rica and Denmark already have. In a sustainable economy, based not on *quantity* of life but quality of life, we'll consume fewer things but

better things, reducing the total volume of transactions, the total throughput of materials, and in the process, increasing our gladness to be alive.

## **POLICIES THAT REWARD SUSTAINABILITY**

1. U.S. Income Tax policy discourages saving and investing by taking a bite out of income. **Solution:** Lower income taxes and instead tax carbon-heavy fuels and technologies, as more than twenty EU countries already have.
2. Mandatory 40-hour workweeks don't offer workers the choice of trading less income for more time. **Solution:** Enact laws that guarantee equal pay per hour for part-time workers, as many EU countries already have.
3. Free parking at workplaces rewards driving but offers no incentives to pedestrians, bicyclers, and carpoolers. **Solution:** give a stipend to all employees, allowing non-drivers to save money if they choose.
4. Daycare tax credits assume that employees would rather pay for daycare than work less and care for their own children. **Solution:** Credit a fixed amount per U.S. child; let parents choose how to spend it.
5. Flat-rate trash policies discourage recycling. **Solution:** Implement "pay as you throw" policies that penalize disposal and enable recyclers to save money.
6. Current beverage container policies don't reward recycling. **Solution:** Enact a federal "bottle bill" law, as eleven states already have.
7. Suburban sprawl wastes time, money, land, and energy. **Solution:** Enact local, state, and federal policies that encourage public transit and compact development.

David Wann is the co-author of the bestseller *Affluenza* and author of *Simple Prosperity: Finding Real Wealth in a Sustainable Society*. This piece first appeared in the Denver Post.

[Table of Contents](#)

---

## **HAPPENINGS**

### **STUDENTS AT CENTRAL MISSOURI UNIVERSITY CELEBRATE TAKE BACK YOUR TIME DAY**

from Maureen Wilt

Happy Take Back Your Time Day a few days early. We will be having a display table and giving out awards and tickets and completing a survey. Students have made TAKE BACK YOUR TIME T-shirts using the flag poster from the vacation Web site. They look great! Students ordered 100 t-shirts so there will be lots of walking advertisements as well as lots of posters and displays around campus. I'll also be presenting at a Parent Fair at a local middle school in November re: TBYT and Right2Vacation.

---

### **SUNY COURTLAND CELEBRATES TAKE BACK YOUR TIME**

from Dr. Lynn Anderson

I am a faculty member at SUNY Cortland, in upstate New York. First, I want to say what an ardent supporter I am of your work (and of my friend, Cathy O'Keefe). Every year at SUNY Cortland, our department has done something to mark Take Back Your Time Day. This year (ironically due to an extreme lack of time on my part), I asked our university president to send out the email below to all faculty, staff, and students, which he did. He also supports this work! Our Take Back Your Time Day activities have been varied. Last year, we did a film showing of *The Motherhood Manifesto*, and a discussion group afterward. The previous year, we did a "sit-in" in a very busy campus building lobby. Faculty, staff and students brought lawn chairs (one grad student brought a very large, bright orange overstuffed recliner!), games, books, puzzles, etc. We had Take Back Your Time posters hanging all over, flyers to hand out, and lots and

lots of good discussion and media coverage all through the day. Another year, we did a campus-wide book chat on the Take Back Your Time book. Etc. We keep trying to do our part, and are highly appreciative of all you do.

**From:** SUNY Cortland President's Office  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 22, 2008 9:56 AM  
**To:** SUNY Cortland Faculty-Staff  
**Subject:** Take Back Your Time Day--Friday, October 24, 2008

This Friday, October 24, is Take Back Your Time Day. On this day, Americans can stop, breathe, and take stock of their work-life balance and quality of life. The date was chosen because, on this date, Americans have worked as much in nine months as Europeans work all year!

[Table of Contents](#)

---

## IN THE NEWS

### MILWAUKEE PASSES SICK DAYS REFERENDUM!

The city of Milwaukee, on Nov. 4, 2008, passed a Paid Sick Days referendum with 69% of voters in favor! It is more great news along with our historic presidential election. See the following online story at <http://www.jsonline.com/news/statepolitics/33874059.html>

### ARTICLES ABOUT TAKE BACK YOUR TIME AND OUR VACATION CAMPAIGN—CHECK THESE OUT!

#### [Getting away shouldn't be just for the birds](#)

Detroit Free Press - United States

Only 14 % of U.S. workers will have had a vacation of two weeks or longer in 2008, according to **Take Back Your Time**, an initiative created to challenge the ...

#### [Another town, Shirley, tries 4-day workweek to save energy](#)

Boston Globe - United States

**John de Graaf**, who directed a PBS documentary about being overworked in America, said the four-day week is a good idea only if it's optional. ...

#### [All Work, No Play](#)

By Silja J.A. Talvi

The only consistent upswing in mood occur when Americans get some time off on the weekends or holidays.

[In These Times - http://www.inthesetimes.com/](http://www.inthesetimes.com/)

#### [Why You Should Work Less](#)

by Sean Gonsalves, Cape Cod Times/AlterNet - San Francisco, CA, USA  
(Sean Gonsalves was one of the founders of TAKE BACK YOUR TIME)

#### [Brother, Can You Spare the Time?](#)

By T. Scott Brineman(T. Scott Brineman)

[Conservative Revolutionary American... - http://crap713three.blogspot.com/](http://crap713three.blogspot.com/)

#### [Starved for time](#)

Waterloo Record - Waterloo,Ontario,Canada

Today, Oct. 24, is **Take Back Your Time** Day, supporters say. It's a project of the Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy at Cornell University, ...

#### [On Oct. 24 Take Back Your Time](#)

Somerset Reporter - Somerset,NJ,USA

by Marin Barrett/Somerset Reporter **Take Back Your Time** Day is a national event devoted to improving our over-worked, over-stressed and over-committed lives. ...

### [Ithaca College Students Invite The Campus And Community To Take A ...](#)

Ithaca College - NY, United States

The students will base their presentation on the **Take Back Your Time** movement, an initiative that advocates a federal law guaranteeing Americans three weeks ...

## **JOB GROWTH STRONG WITH PAID SICK DAYS**

By Vicky Lovell, Ph.D., and Kevin Miller, Ph.D.

Institute for Women's Policy Research

Job growth has been strong in San Francisco compared with other Bay Area counties following implementation of a new paid sick days standard in San Francisco on February 5, 2007, according to data from the California Employment Development Department. Despite an economic slowdown affecting employment in all counties in the Bay Area in 2007, San Francisco maintained a competitive job growth rate that exceeds the average growth rate of nearby counties. In the 12-month period following the effective date of the new policy, employment in San Francisco expanded by 1.1 percent, the same rate as Marin and San Mateo counties and substantially above the rate of employment change in Alameda, Contra Costa, and Santa Clara counties (-0.5, -0.5, and 0.5 percent, respectively).

San Francisco's paid sick days ordinance took effect on February 5, 2007. The law mandates that employees earn paid sick time at the rate of one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked. Employees in small businesses (those with fewer than 10 employees) may accrue a maximum of 40 hours of paid sick time; those in larger firms may accrue a maximum of 72 hours. Paid sick days may be used for employees' own health care and to care for family members. More information is available on the SFGov web site, [http://www.sfgov.org/site/olse\\_index.asp?id=49389](http://www.sfgov.org/site/olse_index.asp?id=49389).

Assessments of San Francisco's new paid sick days policy by business organizations underscore its minor impact on employers. The director of the Golden Gate Restaurant Association told the San Francisco Chronicle that "it hasn't been a big issue" for the companies he represents (quoted in DeBare 2008) and characterized the policy as "successful" (Singer 2008). The San Francisco Chamber of Commerce agreed, noting that "we really have not heard much about it being a major issue" (quoted in the Wall Street Journal; Spors 2008). The strength of San Francisco's labor market is notable in the restaurant industry, where most workers currently lack paid sick days (78 percent; Hartmann 2007). Employment increased by 3.9 percent between the 4th quarter of 2006 and the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2007—a higher growth rate than in the year before the new paid sick days policy was implemented, and stronger growth than any nearby Bay Area county except San Mateo.

The strength of San Francisco's job market since implementation of the paid sick days policy suggests that, like minimum and living wages, adoption of this minimum labor standard does not adversely affect job growth (Dube, Naidu and Reich 2007, Brenner 2005, Potter 2006).

**Table of Contents**

---

## **YOUR LETTERS**

### **From California:**

When will we start a write-in campaign to Congress now that one has been elected? Can someone write a sample letter? I propose the following points for such a letter:

-Get paid vacation to at least 6% of annual salary for commissioned workers at 3 weeks, Canada requires 4% minimum at 2 weeks

-Allow any business closed for at least 7 consecutive days to count as a week off if it is paid, but only one week for the year

-The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is having a hard time just getting the week of sick leave part in place (Visit [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org) and type "sick leave" in search box.)

-Have a clause where employees must notify the employer 3-4 weeks ahead of time to take vacation, but make bereavement exceptions

-Allow for up to 12% of workforce to go on vacation at a time at each location, allow only a maximum of up to 30 consecutive calendar days of blackouts of no vacation during a busy time of year

I received a response about 2 months ago from Senator Dianne Feinstein on the issue.

#### **From California:**

Mark Twain said "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness." In my opinion, if the U.S. Government does not regulate vacation at at least 3 weeks per year, they are actively participating in the modern day slave labor that prevents ordinary Americans from enjoying their life, seeing their country and the rest of the world, and fosters narrow mindedness in Americans. Apart from that, it's disgraceful how little time U.S. companies are giving in paid leave and it needs to be changed.

#### **To the Editor:**

Did you know that Swedish paid-vacation act celebrated 70-year in 2008. In 1938 Sweden got the first 10 days of paid vacation. To be a Swede living in the USA it is really, really sad to see what state a country can get into when "the corporate" is running the country when it comes to workers rights. Oh, I should say I love the USA & Sweden, but the USA has some lessons to "learn" from Sweden.

#### **To the Editor:**

I am very interested in your organization and 100% support what you do. I'm curious though because you mention the Fair Labor Standards Act and the 40 hour workweek like these are actual established successes. However, myself and many people I know have experienced firsthand how many workers that the Fair Labor Standards Act neglects. It makes no sense to me why ANY employee, except perhaps an executive, should have to work overtime for no pay, but this is a growing reality for a large number of workers--most white collar office employees can be categorized as exempt under FLSA. Lack of overtime pay encourages employers to extract free labor from employees and offer them NOTHING in return. Why should they? They don't have to. In fact it comes to the point where in order to be considered a good employee you must work **more** than the 40 hours for which you are paid or else your job is on the line. Even if you complete all your required work in 40 hours, if you don't work more than that, it means you don't have enough to do. That is the situation that my husband, along with MANY others, has to deal with on a regular basis. I agree with your fight for mandatory vacation and sick leave, but an expansion of the FLSA to include mandatory overtime pay for all employees save executives should be on your organization's agenda as well. I think that once there is a significant penalty for forcing employees to work more than 40 hours, it will be less likely to happen. Absolutely, I agree with you that overtime should never be mandatory, but I also think that will be harder to enforce because employers are very good at coming up with BS reasons why they fired people. I think expanding overtime pay to the vast majority of workers will be easier to enforce and will have an immediate effect. This is really key to opening up employment opportunities as well as improving our communities and our families.

#### **From Illinois:**

I am a U.S. citizen and have the same sick time as an illegal immigrant (0). Coming from a job in Ireland, where I was mandated a month of paid vacation time, paid only 20% in taxes, was given free health care, and had no loans for education, I start to wonder what all this propaganda about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is really all about. Can you tell me if achieving a minimum standard of living is part of the American dream?

#### **From Mississippi:**

I recently took a vacation to Arizona to visit my mom. She divorced my dad about 3 years ago. I've missed her a lot, so I took a little over a week off from work, which is waiting tables, to visit her. We spent time together with her husband Johnny. It was so relaxing to completely get away from my hometown. A week of not making money, however, was very stressful when I returned, and it was a struggle to catch back up in time. I ended up having to borrow money from my dad.

**To the Editor:**

You state you endorse no one, then point out that one candidate (the one I support, BTW) supports the agenda of TBYT. You wouldn't be remiss to not bring that up, there is no point in bringing that up. I am concerned that there will be consequences down the line to doing this, perhaps not to you (TBYT) but to other groups / individuals who blatantly push one candidate while declaring they are doing no such thing. It is going to catch up. TBYT is small potatoes and won't suffer directly in the short term, but the fallout will affect you. Best wishes over the long haul, AM

**From Pennsylvania:**

I listened your interview this week on taking back our time. I first had a sense of feeling overwhelmed by the prospect of the U.S. ever really taking this seriously. Then, probably as a way of coping with that feeling, I thought of what I would do if I had the opportunity to do it. For what it is worth, here are some ideas for addressing the situation:

- 1) Amass as much research data as possible demonstrating the connections between paying attention to human needs (my way of talking about taking back our time) and the "bottom line". Documentation on the Canadian situation, for example, with the leave for child-bearing mothers, etc. Our money-first society will only respond when an economic reason exists for taking action.
- 2) Disseminate the research everywhere possible and especially including:
  - a. the Harvard Business Review
  - b. be on the agenda several years in a row at the ASTD and SHRM national meetings
  - c. The TEC Councils network
  - d. Workforce Investment Boards across the U.S.
  - e. Small Business Administration and its network
- 3) Spread the data over the internet by emails and in blogs like MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.
- 4) Secure spots on the Tonight Show and Letterman to talk about it
- 5) Lobby key local and Federal legislators to get them to hold meetings with local and national chambers of Commerce on this issue
- 6) Lobby key union leaders about sharing the information with their employers and putting features into contract negotiations
- 7) I would only seek legislative means of addressing this as a last resort or for specific issues
- 8) Gain the support of Warren Buffet and others and sponsor national ad campaigns

One other step (a risky step or at least, iffy in terms of possible success) would be spreading this information to church groups, putting it in the context of:

Members having more time for family AND church life. Members having more time for personal growth and spiritual development

Thanks for listening. I needed to “vent” some of the frustration and helpless feeling when thinking about the situation.

**PLEASE WRITE TO US!**

**Table of Contents**