



# TAKE BACK YOUR TIME

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## NEWSLETTER -- VOL. 5, ISSUE 3

*"Man is supposed to be the master of his world and of himself. But actually he has become a part of the reality which he has created. He is an object among objects, a thing among things, a cog within a universal machine to which he must adapt himself in order not to be smashed by it. But this adaptation makes him a means for ends which are in reality means themselves, and in which an ultimate end is lacking."*

-- Paul Tillich

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### LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Members and Friends of Take Back Your Time --

In Seattle, it is as if someone dropped the curtain on summer and rolled in the first backdrop of fall. Although we are not yet seeing the morning mists of late fall we are seeing the gentle weavers (our spider friends) emerging in the garden. The produce at the local farmers market is changing from bright purple plums to the reds, greens, and yellows of crisp new apples. It is the cycle of change that thrills me most.

Take Back Your Time is changing. The Board is ready for the organization to take the leading role to bring about a law that will protect your leave. You have a human right to take time away from your work.

For one example, the right to restful time away from work should not be dependent on how healthy you are. It is not right to bundle your sick leave and your vacation time into one package. If you get the flu or your children come down with chicken pox, or your mother needs help after her hip replacement -- it is not right that you will then have to cancel plans to visit with old friends or explore a National Park.

The Fair Labor Standards Act was passed 70 years ago. Guaranteed vacation time was part of the original package. Take Back Your Time believes that 70 years is long enough to wait. With your help and support, we will make right this omission.

Our fundraising goal to launch this campaign is \$15,000 and we are nearly 10% there! Take Back Your Time is a lean but muscular organization. When you donate \$25, \$50 or even \$100 -- it is put to work immediately. Please do not hesitate another moment; we need your help today.

Many of you have already signed on as volunteers -- please join us on the national stage as a volunteer by emailing me directly. Volunteers are needed to specifically to:

- a.) Form an advisory committee to direct online organizing,
- b.) Help with member outreach and volunteer coordination,
- c.) Help create a more meaningful member database, based on where people live
- d.) Form a committee to create a volunteer packet,
- e.) Help promote Take Back Your Time Day activities in your neighborhood or your state,
- f.) Form an advisory committee that will help coordinate our lobbying efforts.

Take Back Your Time is changing. Together, we are unstoppable.

Yours,

Lisa Stuebing

Executive Director, Take Back Your Time

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## HAPPENINGS

### What's the Economy For Conference

Ever wonder if there's a point to all this seemingly endless work? Have we sacrificed the things that matter most for things that matter least? Can we dig our way out of this? Join some of the nation's most prominent activists and thinkers to explore these and other questions!

October 5-7, 2007

Washington DC Convention Center

Full details at:

<http://www.timeday.org/economyconference>

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### LIVE CHAT WITH TBYT

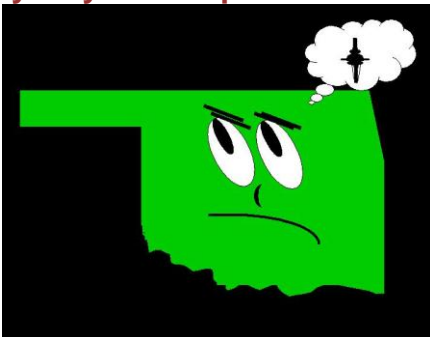
Would you like to interact "live" with a leader in the Take Back Your Time movement? We are starting a series of live chats with board members of TBYT around their areas of expertise. All you have to do is log on or phone in at the designated day and hour. You can ask questions and share observations about hot topics such as vacation challenges, overscheduled kids, the shorter workweek, and the effect of time famine on the environment. No cost, no fuss--just good conversation with leaders in our movement.

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## FEATURE ARTICLE

### They May be Sleepless in Seattle, but I'm Envious in Oklahoma



I'm proud to be an Oklahoman. I love seeing the sun go down over acres of waving wheat. I am always proud how Oklahomans come together to help each other in the face of natural disasters, and here in tornado alley, we have quite a few disasters! But I sometimes puzzle over oddities of the Sooner State. For instance, upon hearing the news that the state of Washington has joined California in providing paid parental leave for working parents, my first thought was not, "Oklahoma will be next!" In fact, while I would hope my daughter's generation could benefit from more generous workplace policies than what we have at present, the truth is, I just can't imagine any improvement for Oklahoma parents unless there is federal legislation. This makes me more than a little envious of those on the West Coast!

Why would I write this, in a state where most of us would say we highly value children and families? Why is California, the land of movie stars whose marriages seldom outlast a TV season, more generous to working parents than our Bible-belt state? In pondering that question, I have come to believe we Oklahomans sometimes carry certain values to extremes. Sometimes cherished beliefs are held with such fierce conviction, that we fail to perceive the need for change or to consider new alternatives.

I will describe four characteristics of Oklahomans. They are traits of which we are quite proud, but which sometimes contribute to a paradoxical quirkiness that causes our coastal friends to shake their heads and shrug. And maybe you will see a similarity or two with your own state!

**Oklahomans have a great respect for tradition.** We are not the first people to jump on any bandwagon. Thus, when women began entering the workplace, Oklahomans were somewhat reluctant to embrace the idea. Don't get me wrong; Oklahoma women have always worked. The men and women who homesteaded here faced enormous difficulties, and the pioneer ladies who braved cold winters, scorching summers, twisters, and dust storms were resilient, hard working, and courageous. They were just able to do their work at home. Of course, it was commonly understood that their contribution to family survival was invaluable. But that tradition made it all the more difficult to see moms leave the home for the office. So, a movement for family leave can't gain much traction. We're reluctant to make it easier for women to continue in employment upon the birth of a child. Incidentally, we were sad to see men leave farms as well, and many men still farm or tend cattle on weekends while holding a full-time job in town.

**Oklahomans are proud of "hard work."** It isn't always obvious what we mean when we place the word "hard" in front of work every time we discuss employment, but our homesteading and agricultural heritage gives us an admiration for those who endure hardship in order to provide for a family. This often befuddles East or West Coast observers. Our great grandparents worked twelve-hour days on the farm. Why should we think we deserve family leave when we already have the luxury of an air-conditioned office building?

**Oklahomans are accustomed to a "boom and bust" economy.** The legacy of the Dust Bowl still lives in Oklahoma memory. And, the Great Depression is not our only "big bust." Agriculture is a risky business, and the oil and gas industry has soared, crashed, and regained prosperity, all during my adult lifetime. The expression "make hay while the sun shines" is never forgotten. Workers, who know tough times are likely soon to come, are reluctant to press for more generous pay or benefits. Employees here do not have the sense of security of those in the booming coastal economies.

**Oklahomans have a steadfast belief in personal responsibility.** Oklahomans are quick to come to the aid of a neighbor who has suffered loss. Our sometimes-fierce springtime storm season provides ample opportunity for us to demonstrate this. And it is not just natural disasters that cause us to pull together as a state. We all remember the enormous outpouring of generosity from the community (and indeed the whole nation) in response to the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah building in 1995. But we have a more-or-less unspoken expectation that the norm is for every family unit to be almost completely self-sufficient. We do not believe it is appropriate, except under the most desperate of circumstances, to accept financial help from someone else. Thus, an idea of employer-provided or government-provided financial assistance to new parents meets with raised eyebrows.

**In summary,** I am afraid that our beliefs about work developed under different circumstances than what we live with today. It's one thing to "make hay while the sun shines" when you're really making hay! But once harvest season is over, there is time for rest. Twelve-hour days may be the norm during planting and harvest, but an agricultural economy gave way to a seasonal rhythm that today's workplaces do not have. We in Oklahoma, as well as others from areas in which a rural heritage is cherished, must assess what will be best for families who live and work in a 24/7 economy. We have always held out hope for better times for the next generation. Parental leave would be an enormous improvement in the lives of working parents and their children, and making things better for the next generation is also an Oklahoma tradition.

*Kelley Smith is an economist and occasional free-lance writer as well as editor of this newsletter. For full disclosure, you should know that since Kelley lives in Oklahoma City, the sight of a sunset over a wheat field is but a treasured memory from her youth. She now witnesses sunsets most often through a hefty layer of ground-level ozone!*

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## MOVERS AND SHAKERS

### TAKE ACTION: SUPPORT FAMILIES WITH THE BALANCING ACT

Most working families struggle to balance the competing responsibilities of work and family -- whether it's finding affordable, quality child care, caring for an elderly relative, or any of the many other concerns facing today's caregivers.

Rep. Lynn Woolsey recently introduced The Balancing Act to address some of [these] concerns.

Encourage your representative to co-sponsor this bill. <http://lists.now.org/t/437866/2064787/1355988/0/>.

## IN THE NEWS

Women Want Shorter Work Days: [www.livescience.com/humanbiology/070322\\_work\\_hours.html](http://www.livescience.com/humanbiology/070322_work_hours.html)

Women are More Rushed than Men: [www.livescience.com/othernews/060125\\_women\\_rush.html](http://www.livescience.com/othernews/060125_women_rush.html)

American Women Are Vacation-Starved: [www.livescience.com/humanbiology/051110\\_vacations.html](http://www.livescience.com/humanbiology/051110_vacations.html)

Job Stress Growing: [www.livescience.com/humanbiology/061122\\_job\\_stress.html](http://www.livescience.com/humanbiology/061122_job_stress.html)

Americans Hate Their Jobs More than Ever: [www.livescience.com/humanbiology/070226\\_hate\\_jobs.html](http://www.livescience.com/humanbiology/070226_hate_jobs.html)

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## MARKETPLACE

Check out the Work+Life "Fit" Blog by Cali Yost

<http://www.worklifefit.com>

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## YOUR LETTERS

### From Los Angeles, CA

Every morning when I sit on the 5 freeway in L.A. rush hour traffic, I ask myself what am I doing? Jaded and overworked at the ripe old age of 25, I wonder who decided we should work five out of seven days a week. I mean, I'm only missing the best years of my life, and I'm always saying so to my 28-year-old boss when I'm asked for my services on a Saturday.

Last year I had five paid days off, but somehow that was an administrative mistake, so this year I only got three. Is that even legal to take days away AFTER the fact? Oh and when I found out, I had already used two and one-half days (once I was sick, once my car died and I spent the day haggling a salesman for a new one, and once I simply had to run out early). No one else in my small but bi-coastal company bothered to raise a stink about being cut two paid days. Are these people crazy? Why, oh why, would anyone let work define them?

Vacation time is separate, but let's face it, ten days is hardly enough time to "get away from it all". My company is in the service industry, so we don't even get those minimal bank holidays either. I am usually so busy that it is difficult for me to pick up a package from the post office during the week without losing pay.

I had NO IDEA more people felt this way and that an entire organization has been forged! I am not a lazy employee; in fact I love the daily challenges of my job. I'm actually doing work that was something of what I studied in college, unlike most Americans. But come on, there are plenty of working days in the year to give me a little more "me time".

I am ALL FOR this "Take Back Your Time" policy. Who's going to disagree to having more time off?

You ROCK the working world!

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### From Utah

I'm trying to find every way I can to promote [timeday.org](http://timeday.org)

The more people "digg it" the more it will rise to the top of the top ranked stories. It would be good to do this with all news releases and let members know about it. Then members can go dig the story and improve the ranking.

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### From Virginia

I work for a large university. I currently have 8 1/2 weeks of leave time which I have accumulated in about a year and a half. I would have more, but I did just get a vacation (although I had to fight for it, and only got 5 of the 7 days I asked for). I receive 10 hours monthly from the state as well as 48 hours annually of family and personal time. In addition, I now have over 200 hours of [accumulated] overtime. I have been told that from now on I will have to take any vacations between mid-February and mid-May, and only on the condition that there are no events scheduled which might require my presence. I know that at least a month of that time will be ruled out. Only one person in the office is allowed to take two weeks consecutively. I know that the FLSA specifically forbids giving overtime hours unless there is a reasonable

expectation that they can be used in a reasonable length of time, but I keep getting hours that I am not allowed to take off. I also get sick leave (five hours monthly), which is use-or-lose time, and I lose most of mine every year (which I don't mind, as I am grateful my health is good!). I have even called in sick and been told that I had to work anyway. Why do employers think that their employees are nothing more than office furniture to be used up and discarded? Is there really any hope for getting our time back?

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#### **From Santa Rosa, California**

I do not work outside the home, however, my husband does. With cell phones and the internet, he is expected to be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, regardless of whether he is "on vacation" or not. Because we live in beautiful Sonoma County, we have many summer visitors throughout the year, and many, if not most of our visitors must excuse themselves throughout their stay to check their emails and respond to work related issues. I don't believe vacations as we used to know them exist at all any more.

Aside from businesses expecting their employees to be available all the time, I am finding an equally unsettling trend regarding children in our society. First of all, our local school district has recently ruled that students may not be absent throughout the school year for anything other than illness, or death of a family member. Students are not allowed to take a vacation during the school year to attend a family wedding, birthday party, or reunion. Nor may they leave school to accompany their parents who leave for a business trip to a foreign country. What a shame that school districts do not value time that children spend with their families or time that children spend exploring new cultures. Children are also prevented from going on family vacations if they wish to participate in competitive sports teams. In our community, there is year round soccer. If a child makes the team, they are expected to have multiple practices each week throughout the year in addition to regularly scheduled games and tournaments (on weekdays and weekends, including Sundays). Child athletes are often penalized (reduced play time, harassment by coaches) if they miss multiple practices for family vacations. Again, this is a sad commentary that sports leagues do not appreciate the need for children to take vacations with their families.

We have chosen to have our children miss days of school (sometimes they are allowed to make up the work, often they are not) and miss practices, despite the consequences they have to deal with. However, my husband still takes his computer on our family vacations, as he doesn't feel that he can risk his employment by not being available to his boss and coworkers.

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#### **From Georgia**

Thank you for taking up the cause of mandatory vacation time. I am in the American class of workers who is afraid to take large blocks of vacation time. My fear is in losing my job to having had the work distributed among several other employees, then my employer deciding I am not needed. The fear may have been unfounded two or three years ago, but not now. We have lost quite a number of employees to better paying positions, so fewer people to manage means fewer managers.

My employer does not offer the option of being paid for unused vacation hours. So I usually attempt to use them by taking one or two days here or there. That is not a good solution either since that usually means there is more work for me to do when I return, because for those short periods of time, work is not really distributed.

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#### **From Orem, Utah**

I really love the work you're doing and I think it's critically important for the quality of life people have in the U.S. For months, I worked 53 hours per week on average. Other employees who worked more were held up as examples as to why I shouldn't complain for the hours I had to work to keep up. Luckily another recently acquired my company, and there has been a hiring freeze.

The MomsRising.org sells their DVD and T-Shirts to raise money for the cause on <http://goodstorm.com/index.html>. What about setting up an account for timeday.org to sell T-Shirts with the great posters from timeday.org to help raise money for the cause.

People walking around with T-shirts would help get the word out in more ways than one.

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#### **From Silver Springs, Florida**

I manage a small store and am entitled to two weeks paid vacation. However, whenever I put in for my time, I am told I cannot take more than 3 or 4 days at a time, [I am also told] "Keep away from the weekends." If I even get my time, I end up working for one reason or another. When I ask to have my time back, I am told, "You worked your vacation time." It was not my choice; I was called in. I work weekends, holidays, and whenever someone else calls in [sick]. I think this is nonsense. Laws should be passed to ensure people take their time off without all kinds of conditions and without being forced to work through the vacation

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### **From Dallas, Texas**

I just came across your group and think it has a great program. There is one aspect of the vacation situation that interests me that I did not see on your web page. I am 64 years old and get two weeks vacation--the same as anyone starting their career. Who needs more vacation, someone 30 years old or someone 64? I have worked for five companies that either went out of business or had major downsizings. Only once did I work more than five years for one company. Five years has always been the magic number for receiving three weeks vacation and every company has reset the vacation clock to two years when I started with them. We should have a way of carrying vacation time over, or at least some of it, from job to job.

I have a friend in England who is five years younger than me. He gets six weeks vacation, yet has worked for four companies that I know of, and he is not even in upper management.

I see one possible problem with your program. Last year my wife and I went on a tour of Greece. It was wonderful, very enlightening. There were about 22 people on the bus, including only four couples. The rest were women traveling alone, most of whom were married; a few were traveling with their daughters or a sister. Where were their husbands? Several told us their husbands did not want to go on such a vacation. The women seemed more open-minded and adventurous than their husbands. Or maybe the men thought it would be a vacation just to be away from their wives. I guess my point is that more vacation time is great if people want it and know how to use it effectively. There may be some education required here. If you do not know what to do on vacation, or cannot afford to get away, or do not want to socialize (even with just a spouse), perhaps extra vacation me would seem like an additional stressful experience.

In any case, I am for more vacation.

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