



TAKE BACK YOUR TIME

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NEWSLETTER - May 2009

"Compulsory education is a good thing. Compulsory recreation may be even better."

--naturalist John Muir, 1876

"The awkward secret about the American growth engine is that it thrives by wantonly wasting the non-economic 'assets' of people's lives, the lost potential of their time on earth."

--William Greider, *Come Home America*

"All their lives they had focused on climbing the ladder, only to find when they got to the top that it was leaning against the wrong building."

--Malcolm Street

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - JOHN DE GRAAF

Dear Take Back Your Time Supporters:

I have some terrific news to share with you!!! At 11 am, Thursday, May 21st on the Cannon House Office Building Terrace, Congressman Alan Grayson of Florida will introduce the first paid vacation bill in US

history at a press conference. Board members Bill Doherty, Joe Robinson and I will be with the Congressman as he announces the legislation. The basic points of the bill are included below my email in an email from Congressman Grayson's staff.

As you will see, this is a very modest bill, but as a friend who is a US Senate staffer told me, it's a "down payment" for future improvements. TAKE BACK YOUR TIME hopes that all individuals and organizations that care about the quality of life of working people will endorse this legislation. We hope that it will be ultimately strengthened, but we are grateful that Congressman Grayson is, by this bill, bringing America's lack of vacation time to public attention and beginning, however modestly, to address it. We honor Congressman Grayson for his support! I hope you will add your support for this bill and will assist me in reaching out to other organizations. We would love to have any of you join us at the introduction press conference for this groundbreaking and historic occasion. I am very excited about this--it is the culmination of hard work by many people!

Please let me know if you can help and feel free to call me at 206 407-5490 for any further information.

Additionally, we will be addressing this bill at our Seattle Vacation Matters Summit in August and Congressman Grayson hopes to join us there. I hope that many of you can make this first-ever conference and be part of the history we are trying to make. I will be sending out another announcement this week about the Summit.

all best,

John de Graaf

www.right2vacation.org

Congressman Alan Grayson (FL-08)

May 21, 2009

"Draft" Paid Vacation Act of 2009

What the Bill would do:

What

- **Paid Vacation Leave:** The bill would require "at least" one week of paid vacation be offered by companies with 100 or more employees.
- **Expansion of Vacation Leave:** Three years after enactment, companies with 50 or more employees would be required to offer at least one week of paid vacation, and companies with 100 or more employees would be required to offer at least two weeks of paid vacation.

Who

- **Full Time:** Full time workers that have served at least one year at a company of 100 employees.

- **Full Time:** Three years after enactment, full time workers that have served at least one year at a company of 50 or more employees.
- **Part Time:** Part time workers that serve at least 25 hours a week and 1100 hours a year would qualify for paid vacation leave immediately.

SICK LEAVE—KENNEDY AND DE LAURO TO REINTRODUCE HEALTHY FAMILIES ACT ON MAY 18

Take Back Your Time proudly supports the Healthy Families Act, which will be reintroduced in Congress on May 18th by Senator Edward Kennedy and Congresswoman Rosa De Lauro. The Act would provide seven paid sick days by law for all American workers. Virtually every other country in the world has such a law and it is certainly needed when, as with the recent “swine flu” scare, health departments and schools tell people to stay home from work or keep their children home when they are sick, but when half of all American workers, and 86% in the restaurant industry, have no paid sick days. Write to your Senators and Representatives and ask them to support the Health Families Act. It’s vitally necessary!

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR - KELLEY SMITH

I recently had a conversation with a distraught single parent, one who has made extraordinary sacrifices to bring up a child alone (spouse is deceased). The parent is deeply concerned about this young teen’s recent fascination with Internet-based social networking sites. Teen has attempted to meet a date (of majority age) through a connection from a website. The parent’s real worry? WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT THOSE AFTER-SCHOOL HOURS BEFORE I GET HOME? I can’t change my work hours, and a reduced schedule is not an option. My job (and health insurance with it) is an all-or-nothing deal.

Someone else I know spends most evenings trying to keep up with new developments in the IT field. This guy is a salaried employee who frequently brings work home to complete after hours. When he’s not working, he feels compelled to learn, lest he fall behind and be a target for downsizing.

And these people are fortunate to have jobs.

We all know the plight of the downsized, unemployed, or underemployed.

Many of you, no doubt, wish for a more humane workplace—a workplace with flexible hours, family leave, time allowed for training and career development, accommodations for parents during child-rearing years—workplaces that have a place for everyone who needs to work. And you know the chorus of protest that arises from the business community, “We’ll go broke.”

To be sure, the kinds of changes in business operations I’ve mentioned would not come for free. Yet, families have made countless and significant sacrifices for the profitability and productivity of businesses. Unpaid overtime, leisure time spent learning new software, or vacation days forgone have all contributed to the productivity and profitability of our business sector. The benefits of that productivity and profitability have not filtered down to average employees. What if the sacrifices we made were of a different form? What if, rather than sacrifice so much in time and effort in the hope of maintaining a job, we sacrificed some productivity for society as a whole?

If our society wished to apply the benefits of technology or increased productivity to a different end, say, increased vacation, or a few days of guaranteed sick leave, it could be accomplished. It would require foregoing some other alternative, say perhaps, executive pay or shareowner dividends or even some conveniences for customers such as 24/7 phone centers.

Think about the tradeoffs you would be willing to make. Then write us, or better yet, write your Congressman!

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Feature Articles

Our Inner Old Wise

Isabelle Gingras

To rejoice at an ice cream cone convinced, at that precise instant, that it is the best stuff there is in the whole-wide-world.

To blow on dandelion seeds thinking you are spreading magical flurries, while the grown-ups are stigmatizing the flower and uprooting the weed.

Nurturing our inner child, as the saying goes, affords us to savor the moments, unencumbered by questionable worries and grounded in the preciousness of life's small happenings. Blessed are those who can look at the world through the eyes of an insatiably curious child!

But I have come to believe that there is another voice to nurture inside of us, that of the inner old wise.

The inner old wise is the person we will be when we are older, much older. If the inner child is the one who enables us to savor time, the inner old wise is the one who is best positioned to know what to do with it.

I find it often very difficult to make certain choices. Sometimes, I would like to work more to afford an "easier" life, with more opportunities to eat out, buy stuff, and travel. But there is a flip side to that decision – to spend less time nurturing my marriage and the relationship with my daughter. Once in a while, I spend time discussing my grievance with a friend or family member, while it would be much more difficult (but also wiser) to spend that time mending the relationship. When I have free alone time, I often choose the easy distraction, such as TV or the internet, over investing myself in the projects that I care dearly about but that require more effort.

Those are choices, conscious and unconscious, that I make on a daily basis. Sometimes, I am so caught up in the hustle and bustle that I don't even recognize that there was a choice to make in the first place. The choices, and their flip sides, are hidden in every action that I take. Talking to my inner old wise helps me to pause and think. When I hesitate, I ask: "What will feel most precious to me when I am older, much older?" The answer is nearly always obvious.

Making decisions in how I spend my time by consulting with the inner old wise is like having a compass to guide me to what feels most important in life. Doesn't it become a little more obvious to us, when we are older, how misguided some of our choices have been? Doesn't it become easier, with a lifetime perspective, to accept delaying gratification in order to accomplish what truly matters to us or spend the time we need with those we love? Making sacrifices in the moment is incredibly difficult. The inner old wise is there to help me

out. With its perspective on a life that is peacefully ending, the inner old wise reminds me of what truly matters and enables me to make in the present the hard choices that are, over a lifetime, the most satisfying.

The inner old wise empowers me to become the person I want to be. There are, of course, so many unknowns. I may switch course, change opinions or face a life event that will entirely alter my life view. Still, I find that the inner old wise has enough distance and perspective to not only facilitate my current choices, but to remind me of the things I tend to forget. Like not sweating the small stuff. Or minding my own life instead of commenting on others'. Having patience while navigating life's bends. Knowing that the most happiness does not always stem from the most pleasure.

I distinctly remember, when my daughter was two months old, an afternoon when she was as fussy as could be. Alone with her, I felt my patience gradually dissipate. In the midst of her crying, I remembered my inner old wise. Suddenly, I wasn't an exasperated mom rocking her baby. I was this old wise who watched a mommy hold her crying baby. And that old wise remembered those days, when she cared for a tiny being, with fondness and love. She would probably, if she could, come back to live that one instant, even if in that one instant her baby was inconsolable. This, she thought, was life at its most vibrant.

Upon coming back to the moment, I too felt that indeed, this was life at its most vibrant.

I may forget most of the time to consult my inner old wise. Still, every instance that I do leads to my most worthwhile choices.

As a grown-up, I live in a very busy zone between the innocence of a child and the wisdom of an elder. In my active and blurry life that seems to zoom by so fast, I feel the need to slow down to the pace of the youngest and the eldest who live within me. One gives me the time to taste a drop of rain. The other, the time to realize that tasting a drop of rain is indeed a very important thing to do.

Isabelle Gingras, Ph. D., is a speaker and writer on the importance of time. Most gratefully, she is mom to a playful girl, wife to a compassionate husband and lover of travel. She lives in Montreal, Quebec

Pay for Play? Tax Credits for Paid Time Off

Dean Baker, Center for Economic and Policy Research

Economists are increasingly coming to the recognition that the current downturn is likely to be longer and more severe than they had expected at the time the last stimulus package was approved in February. As a result, there is likely to be interest in additional stimulus in order to boost the economy and lower the unemployment rate.

This paper briefly outlines a method for Congress to quickly boost demand in the economy, while at the same time promoting important public ends: an employer tax credit for paid time off. This paid time off can take the form of paid family leave, paid sick days, paid vacation, or a shorter workweek. This tax credit can both provide short-term stimulus and also provide an incentive to restructure workplaces in ways that are more family friendly. It is possible that many workplaces may leave in place changes made to take advantage of this tax credit even after it has expired.

This and other interesting articles can be found at the CEPT website:

<http://www.cepr.net/index.php/publications/reports/pay-for-play-tax-credits-for-paid-time-off/>

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From Our Board Members

From Anne Nolan:

Hi, all.

We're doing a story in the April issue of the WFC Resources Work-Life Newsbrief about the Shared Work program - the little-known program similar to Germany's that's offered in 17 U.S. States (and Canada has one, too).

I am pasting our article below - it's just gone to press and will be out April 1. This is a paid-subscription-based publication. People interested in purchasing a subscription can find subscription info at www.wfcresources.com.

Quietly saving jobs

While the President's recovery plan gets all the attention, 17 states from Florida to Oregon have already been quietly saving thousands of jobs. They're providing partial

unemployment benefits to workers whose employers have chosen hours cuts instead of layoffs.

A win-win-win deal

Instead of laying off 20% of its workers, an employer in Minnesota, for instance, can file a Shared Work plan with its state unemployment agency and then cut everyone's hours by one day a week. The plan names which workers are affected and tells how long the hours reduction is expected to last. Then the state's unemployment agency pays partial unemployment benefits to those workers in proportion to the hours they've lost. Everyone wins – the workers are compensated for much of their lost income, the employer keeps its experienced workforce, and the state most likely pays out less in benefits than it would have if some workers had been laid off and had to launch a search for a new job. Even other businesses benefit, because preserving workers' job security and income preserves their spending power as consumers.

The employer gets to keep its workforce

³This is a real benefit that employers can offer to their employees rather than just cut hours,² says Kirsten Morell of Minnesota's Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). Minnesota is seeing increased participation, Morell says; interest picked up in late 2007. Before then, DEED typically had 50 employers a year in the program. By March of 2009, Minnesota had 255 active plans covering a total of more than 20,000 workers and was adding new plans at the rate of 20-25 per week. Many of them are in businesses related to housing, says Morell. Mark Laven, president of New

York pool manufacturer Latham International, told the Albany Times Union that although New York's program helps his business get through the off-season, ³the real value is during this time of recession. Our industry is off significantly, as are other industries. The market will rebound and we want to retain those people.² Latham's HR VP estimates that in the four years the company has used the program it has avoided more than 100 layoffs and improved productivity and quality. Employees like the program because they keep their health insurance, seniority, and vacation time.

Benefits are only available to groups

Unlike ordinary unemployment claims, in a Shared Work plan the claimants aren't required to search for other work. So the state needs to know in advance who they are in

order to be able to properly process their claims. Shared Work benefits aren't available to individuals, only to groups of employees whose employer's plan has been pre-approved. Most states take from two weeks to 30 days to approve an application, and there may be a waiting week after that before employees can get benefits. The employer must continue to provide any fringe benefits. Some, like health insurance, might simply be continued as is; other benefits might be pro-rated in proportion to the reduced number of hours worked. The employer must also certify that the plan replaces layoffs that would have involved an equivalent number of hours. And if the employees have a collective bargaining agreement, the employer must also submit a written agreement between the company and the union.

Once its plan is approved, the employer reports each week

on the actual hours that each employee in the plan works. If business picks up in any given week and employees go back to working 40 hours, then they aren't eligible for benefits for that week. The plan is intended to be temporary – typically six months to a year – but if business improves and the employees go back to full-time permanently, the employer can end the plan early. If it does, it must notify the state. Or if business worsens further and the employer lays workers off, it must also notify the state.

The catch? There is some paperwork

In Minnesota, says Morell, the average number of workers per plan is about 70-75, and their applications need to be coded manually. ³We have to do the data entry to enter them in a plan so they are coded to get the correct set of questions each week.² Instead of the usual questions about looking for work, these are tailored to Shared Work participants. But once participants are in the system, they can request benefits each week in the same manner as everyone else, generally online or through an automated phone system.

Automation can help

In states that aren't as automated as Minnesota, the extra administration can be a problem. In a Shared Work plan where hours have been cut 10%, there may be ten times as many applicants as in a regular layoff. One Arizona blogger lamented that when her university employer entered a Shared Work plan for 10,000 employees, her benefits were late; she called her HR department and learned the hold-up was probably due to the entry of 199 pages of employee data that had to be faxed to the state's Department of Economic Security because it had no way to accept electronic files. (If they were ultimately laid off, staffers commiserated, they could get jobs as data-entry clerks at DES!) The extra administrative burden may explain why a handful of states that have tried the program discontinued it. The Wall Street Journal reports that since California became the first state to adopt work-sharing in 1978, three states – Illinois, Louisiana, and North Dakota – have adopted the program but later repealed it or let it fall out of use. In highly-automated Minnesota, though, Morell says, it doesn't cost a lot extra to administer the Shared Work program; ³we normally spend about one staff person on it.² It's worth it, she says, because ³we wanted to give employers another option.²

Other countries are doing it too

Other countries have similar programs – with similar issues. Part of Canada's recent \$8.3 billion ³skills and transition² package will fund improvements in its work-sharing program, which like ours is implemented through unemployment insurance. The new funds will expand eligibility, reduce paperwork and waiting periods, and lengthen the time employers can stay in the Canadian program. In Germany, funds go to the employers, which pass them along to affected employees; in February, 700,000 German employers applied, up from 290,000 in January. Nearly 1.5 million German workers have

shifted to shorter hours since last October. Several major Japanese employers, with their tradition of lifetime employment, have implemented work-sharing programs on their own, and Japan is now considering providing public money for the practice. South Korea's economic recovery plan will also feature work-sharing as a key element, said a labor ministry official there.

Buzz is slowly starting to grow

Even though the program's been around for years, the Shared Work item we reported on in the January 2009 Newsbrief was the first we'd heard of it. But buzz is starting to grow. Wall Street Journal reporter Cari Tuna wrote a comprehensive story about work sharing on the day that President Obama's inaugural address lauded the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job.² In February the New York Times did a piece on furloughs in our workaholic culture (with some great quotes from some of our favorite authors), and in March, author Elizabeth Gregory blogged about Shared Work for the Huffington Post. ³This option makes much more sense than layoffs in many environments,² said Gregory, ³and should be available nationwide.²

Thousands of workers get to keep their jobs

We agree. If you live in Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont, or Washington, spread the word about your Shared Work program at your local chamber or HR gatherings. If you live in one of the other 33 states, write your state legislators and tell them your state needs a law like this. And if your state's unemployment agency isn't yet automated enough to be up to the task, remind your legislators that there's money for unemployment modernization in the recovery bill (see Newsbrief 3-09), so there's no time like the present. When thousands of workers get to keep their jobs, healthcare, and most of their income intact during their employers' cutbacks, with very little more cost (or even a net gain) to employers and the state than if the employers had cut jobs instead, the benefits to the economy ripple throughout the

state. Who knows - the business you save may be your own.

– Anne Nolan for the WFC Resources Work-Life Newsbrief, April 2009

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IN THE NEWS

May 4, 2009

The Cost of Staying Home Sick

Timely editorial from New York Times

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/05/opinion/05tue3.html?_r=1&ref=opinion

May 2, 2009

TBYT in the news: Why Americans Should Work Less and Vacation More

<http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/271809>

March 29, 2009

Europe's Solution: Take More Time Off

<http://roomfordebate.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/03/29/europes-solution-take-more-time-off/>

March 25, 2009

Stark Introduces Paid Family Leave Legislation

http://www.stark.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1252&Itemid=62

February 28, 2009

An Alternative to Layoffs: The Shorter Workweek

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/01/jobs/01workweek.html>

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MARKETPLACE

Always something interesting in Cali Yost's blog at:

<http://www.fastcompany.com/blog/cali-yost/worklife-fit-not-balance/time-move-if-flex-why-and-how-flex>

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YOUR LETTERS

From Pennsylvania

I work for a large company. Our vacation time is set up like this:

1-9 years: 27 "PD's" (personal days; encompasses all aspects, sick, personal, etc.)

10-20 years: 32 PD's

20-forever: 35 PD's.

You are allowed to carry over a week's PD'S and get paid for a week's PD'S at the end of the year. You are also not penalized for using all your PD'S.

Recently, our company has been hit by the economy stick. They froze our salaries, gave us crappy bonuses, took away our usual holiday gifts, and laid off people. They've also changed our benefits to the crappiest HMO plan you can find (and seriously I thought last year's was the crappiest....little did I know we could find

an even crappier one!) We also anticipate that our 401(k) contributions from the company will be either frozen or ditched completely this year. Now our latest rumor that the staff hears is that they are thinking of "taking back" some of our PD'S. Is this legal?? Is there anything I can do to prevent this? I am absolutely sick over this. It's bad enough that all this happened and we have yet to receive any communication from our employer but we've also canned all our

floaters so now when we have a day off (or a week), our bosses do not get coverage instead they are shuffled around from floor member to floor member making it even harder to enjoy your vacation knowing the sheer absolute mess you are coming back to. I had one day off this week, and I was absolutely CRAZED yesterday.

From Portland, OR

I was about to sign your petition, but it refers to the undersigned as "being part of the 70 % of Americans ...", and as a permanent resident I can't legally pass myself as an American, even in an innocuous context. So if you would please ever so slightly modify the text of the petition to include residents, I would greatly appreciate it.

I found your website as I was very angry at the lack of legal support for workers in America and looking for like-minded people. Just recently my boss cut some most of our vacation: employees with one year of seniority get... 24 hours of paid vacation. I worked there since the business started, but left for a few months and was rehired last year. My partner got the same treatment.

My boss even tried to deduct the vacation that my coworkers had not yet taken from the little embryo of vacation left to them, but I found legal proof that benefits already earned may not be taken away. Apparently he wasn't aware this was illegal and he took part of that new policy back, but considering that his business is still booming despite the economic crisis, and given the fact that he offered no apology or regrets, and that he encourages us to take time off for "rest and recuperation" (and how are we the working poor supposed to paid our bills?!), I am outraged, and even more outraged at my coworkers' lack of reaction. Everybody's defeated and more or less thinks that vacation is a privilege and not a right. It makes me think of abused children for whom being beat up is a standard.

Anyways, sorry about my rant (let's not even get into healthcare). I would love to sign your petition and I'm looking into learning how to write a bill and joining a group.

From Tampa, FL

I got this idea from a person at my work who used to live in Europe. He said at very least, law requires them to take 4 weeks of paid vacation. So when I heard that I decided to compare countries around the world including the USA. I find it absolutely ridiculous that there is not a law in this nation that gives paid time off.

I believe it's not only necessary for every full time American employee to have paid time off, but studies show the average employee coming back from vacation or holiday is more productive at their work. I would propose at the very least four weeks of paid time off every year after one year of full time employment. Now one thing politicians would consider about this is—will it help boost the economy. Will it help raise our national GDP? Even though I will always believe this is a nation where anything is possible, I think it will be a while before this can become reality, especially with this global financial crisis going on. I just hope Barack Obama can turn things around.

From Madison, WI

How can a family or a single person keep their sanity and health without a regular schedule of vacations? In my estimation, the crime rate and the mental health problems come from lack of having the time to relax and be with family and friends for a certain length of time each year. It is necessary to learn to play. Thank you.

From Middletown, NY

I have worked for several investment banks over the last ten years and everyone has given me a hard time when it came to my vacation time. They don't even want to pay you for the time when you are laid off from the company! How illegal!

From Sacramento, CA

I routinely work 6 and sometimes 7 days a week. Every year we do get a 2 week vacation but it is not paid. I wonder if we would have time to spend money if this would help the economy.

From Ohio

When I moved with my military husband and was lucky enough to get a job, not only did I take a \$10,000 pay cut, but the policy at this firm is on the pathetic side when it comes to vacation time and sick time. Five days! Total! for the first two years. My salary doesn't include healthcare, as it did at my old job. At my old job, everyone got five days of sick time a year, plus ten vacation days starting after a 90 day trial period. To me, that sounds about right. This sucks!

From Illinois

I can attest to the connection of health, relationship and overall well being to proper vacations. I have worked in the UK for approximately two years. From the first day of start I have received four weeks (standard) vacation time, plus bank holidays, Easter holiday, Christmas, etc. People are happier here and don't mind going to work or accepting lower pay because at the end of the day, they have time to spend with friends and family I will be returning back to the states in two months and very weary.

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