



**ENOUGH WITH THE SWIFT BOATS: CANDIDATES SHOULD ADDRESS SOMETHING AMERICANS NEED TODAY -- TIME FOR FAMILY AND COMMUNITY**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Seattle, WA** – As Labor Day approaches, it's time to offer American workers what they need most—**time to live**—say leaders of the **Take Back Your Time** ([www.timeday.org](http://www.timeday.org)) campaign.

They point out that according to a recent Harvard University study, *The Work, Family and Equity Index: Where Does the United States Stand Globally?*, ([www.globalworkingfamilies.org](http://www.globalworkingfamilies.org)), the US places far behind European countries and many others in regards to work-time policies that are needed to care for children and other family members. For example, of 168 countries studied, 163 guarantee all workers *paid* childbirth leave. The US does not. Ninety-six countries, including all industrial countries, guarantee paid annual leave, averaging four weeks or more. The US does not.

“While we knew that American workers put in longer hours than those in all other industrial countries, we had no idea that we also rank below many *poor* countries in regards to maternity leave, sick leave, vacation time and other indicators of work/life balance,” explains John de Graaf, national coordinator for Take Back Your Time, a major initiative to address issues of overwork, over-scheduling and time urgency. “American workers and their families are facing a real time crisis.”

*The Wall Street Journal* recently confirmed that Americans are spending 20% more time on the job today than in 1970, while working hours have declined in other industrial countries. A Hilton Hotel report finds that only 23 percent of Americans come to work refreshed on Mondays. Our vacations are getting shorter, and a new AFL-CIO “Ask a Working Woman” survey found that 37% of women earning less than \$40,000 a year (and 28% of all working women) receive no paid vacation at all.

“I’m amazed at how little attention these issues are receiving in this election year,” says Gretchen Burger, national staff for Take Back Your Time. “Instead of attacking President Bush for taking vacations, John Kerry should be championing the rights of *all* Americans to some paid time off.”

“George Bush has said that he wants to give American families more time,” adds Jerome Segal of the University of Maryland and Take Back Your Time board member. “But in fact, his new Labor Department rules threaten to take away overtime pay from millions of Americans, and will actually encourage employers to demand even more overtime work.”

“We hope that George Bush and John Kerry will both be asked to address this issue during their television debates,” adds de Graaf. “Instead of focusing on whether or not a small boat was fired upon

on a Southeast Asian river 35 years ago, the media should be demanding that candidates speak to current issues, like how poorly the US fares when it comes to work/life balance. Time is one huge family value that's been forgotten in all the recent arguments about values.”

These are the kinds of discussions the Take Back Your Time campaign wants to generate and will promote on **Take Back Your Time Day** -- October 24<sup>th</sup>. The campaign is advocating a 4 point legislative agenda:

- 1) *Enact paid family leave.* Millions of poor Americans can't afford to utilize the Family and Medical Leave Act, which allows workers 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for newborn children or sick relatives. Every other industrial country recognizes the need for *paid* leave in such cases.
- 2) *Require three weeks minimum paid vacation for all workers.* Currently, American workers average two weeks of paid leave, and far too many get none at all. By contrast, a four week minimum is the law in all member countries of the European Union. Studies repeatedly show the importance of vacations for physical and mental health.
- 3) *Give workers the right to refuse overtime after 48 hours on the job per week.* Unlike Canadians and Europeans, American workers have no right to refuse overtime work. Yet such a choice is crucially important, especially for workers with family commitments.
- 4) *Make Election Day a holiday.* Such a step may seem insignificant but it would symbolize concern that Americans need more time for civic and community participation.

“Each of these reforms, if passed, would only give the US what all other industrial countries already take for granted,” says Gretchen Burger. “Life is about more than the Gross Domestic Product. We could borrow a page from the Europeans’ book and live better by working less, and finding more time for the things that matter most—family, friends, community, health. That would be a real Labor Day reward for American workers.”

**To find out more about this campaign to improve working conditions for all Americans, visit the official web site at [www.timeday.org](http://www.timeday.org).**

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*Take Back Your Time is a project of the Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy at Cornell University, and is the first national initiative of the Simplicity Forum.*