



# TAKE BACK YOUR TIME DAY

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## LACK OF TIME THREATENS CHERISHED AMERICAN IDEALS

*SEATTLE, July 4.* 227 years ago, our founders signed the Declaration of Independence, demanding their “inalienable” rights to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Now a new citizens’ group is calling for a re-dedication to the pursuit of happiness, and liberty from the chains of American overwork.

“Most Americans today are so overworked, rushed and stressed out they don’t have time for happiness. Many of us don’t even have time to vote,” says Barbara Brandt, a Boston writer and activist. That’s why Brandt is encouraging her friends and colleagues to participate in TAKE BACK YOUR TIME DAY, a new non-partisan initiative scheduled for October 24, 2003.

On that day, thousands of people throughout the United States will participate in teach-ins, workplace discussions and other public events, calling national attention to the impacts of overwork and time poverty on Americans’ health, families, communities, civic life, economy and environment.

TAKE BACK YOUR TIME DAY organizers say it’s time for Americans to declare independence from overworked, over-scheduled, and overstressed lives and win back the liberty of leisure.

Consider the words of Benjamin Franklin, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. “Does thou love life? Then do not squander time; for that’s the stuff life is made of.” More than 200 years ago, Franklin declared that” if every man or woman would work for four hours a day on something useful, that labor would procure all the necessaries and comforts of life.”

But today in America, despite enormous increases in labor productivity since Franklin’s time, a third of us are working ten hours a day, not four. On average, Americans work *nine weeks more each year* than Western Europeans do. In fact, we work more than medieval peasants did.

“Work has become our modern religion,” says Ben Hunnicutt of the University of Iowa, a supporter of TAKE BACK YOUR TIME DAY and a contributor to the *Take Back Your Time* handbook, to be published next month. Information about the book and TAKE BACK YOUR TIME DAY is available at ([www.timeday.org](http://www.timeday.org)).

“On average, Americans are now working nearly five weeks more per year than they were in 1970,” says Juliet Schor of Boston College. In millions of cases, the overwork comes in the form of mandatory overtime, which has now reached historic levels, while many other Americans are losing their jobs.

American overwork leaves us with little or no time for civic participation. “Taking care of our democracy takes time,” argues Paul Loeb of Seattle, author of *Soul of a Citizen*. “We need time to study the issues, time to communicate with our elected officials, time to volunteer and time to vote.” Only 51.3% of Americans turned out to vote in the 2000 Presidential election. Of those who didn’t vote one fifth said they just didn’t have enough time.

“The past few years have shown us the catastrophic consequences of a world moving too fast where powerful corporate interests operate at unlimited speeds, leaving busy, overworked citizens no time to think, let alone act,” adds Loeb.

Between now and October 24<sup>th</sup>, TAKE BACK YOUR TIME DAY activists will be seeking out and honoring corporations and other institutions which are making real efforts to create work/life balance for their employees. The first will be honored on August 24<sup>th</sup>, at a conference in Seattle.

“Time is a basic human resource,” says Jon Rowe, co-founder of Redefining Progress. “It is the starting point of freedom. The reason to reduce work-time is not just to gain more rest. It is also because there is so much important civic work that truly needs to be done. What better day than July 4<sup>th</sup> –freedom day--to begin thinking about this?”

“It could be the beginning of a new American commitment to the pursuit of *happiness* instead of the single-minded pursuit of money and stuff,” claims TAKE BACK YOUR TIME DAY national coordinator, John de Graaf, editor of the *Take Back Your Time* handbook. New studies by psychologists Tim Kasser and Kirk Warren Brown show a clear correlation between overwork and materialistic goals on one hand, and unhappiness on the other.

“We hope TAKE BACK YOUR TIME DAY will be like the first Earth Day, which raised American awareness of our environmental crisis, and led to personal, corporate and political changes,” adds organizer Gretchen Burger. “Our current time crisis also threatens to undermine American society. Join us now and help send a strong message to American leaders on October 24<sup>th</sup> that there’s no present like the time.”

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

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