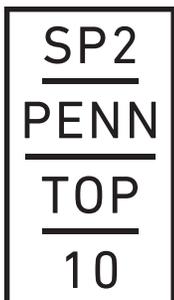


TRANSFORMING OUR WORK SOCIETY

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In the United States, your job defines you. Work is at the center of life in America. Any job that generates income is seen as more valuable than other types of “work” we can perform—parenting, family care, volunteering or artistic pursuit. The goal that propels our work-centered culture is having an income-producing job. The problem we face, however, is that this emphasis on work causes serious problems in other parts of our society.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

While our society promotes obtaining and holding a job as our single-most valuable pursuit, the number of long-term jobs available in America has been severely reduced and replaced by short-term positions. Lower-paying jobs in retail, customer service, and food service are much more prevalent today than the higher-paying positions we used to have in manufacturing and construction. Too many of our workers hold precarious, temporary jobs or no job at all. Years after the Great Recession, 8.5 million former workers remain unemployed.

Today, there are not enough jobs in the United States to go around. Our current employment-age population is around 210 million. Only 145 million of these citizens are actually employed.

WHY IS THIS ISSUE IMPORTANT?

- Society's emphasis on traditional (or labor market) paid work impedes our ability to provide proper child and family care
- The lack of respect for non-paying work hinders our civic and volunteer engagement
- More than 20 million employment-age youth are currently unemployed
- Unemployed youth not pursuing post-secondary education have few earning opportunities in today's society
- The reduction in construction jobs has impacted America's physical infrastructure
- The United States recently received a grade of "D" in our infrastructure improvement efforts

CHANGING WHAT “WORK” MEANS

While our society emphasizes traditional paying jobs, employment opportunities are dwindling and the future looks less and less promising for young job seekers. With nearly 65 million employment-age people unemployed, how do we keep these citizens engaged in our society to help keep the country moving forward? The answer is to transform and expand what we consider to be “work.” Then, we must implement policies that make “work” available and compensated for all who can perform it.

The U.S. must transition from a work society to what is known as a “postwork” society. In a postwork society, the idea of “work” is expanded beyond just labor-market jobs. In a postwork environment, income-producing jobs are not considered to be the highest calling and primary moral duty. Traditional paid work is not the center of social life. Income-producing work is not prioritized over all other pursuits.

In a postwork society, what we currently consider to be civic engagement would be compensated like traditional income-producing work. Any involvement in the arts, our communities, politics, family care, parenting, elderly care would be compensated. This civil labor would be recognized, valued and rewarded with “civic money,” which is a form of compensation for civic work that could take the form of cash, exchange or system of credit.

Ideally, people in a postwork society would engage in multiple activities where “income” was made up of traditional income-producing jobs and civic work. Since we currently do not have enough income-producing job opportunities, we should pursue a policy initiative that would establish a guaranteed employment program in the U.S. A guaranteed employment program could move those currently unemployed into civic positions. This type of program would need to be paired with a universal basic income policy that could be funded with money moved from programs like unemployment insurance, food assistance and cash assistance.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

A postwork society would go a long way in engaging citizens in America who are outside the current labor market. It would help overcome societal challenges like poor volunteer participation, failing infrastructure, difficult family care and supportive parenting. The next president of the United States must be encouraged to embrace the ideals of a postwork society and support its development.