

# A Flexible Sabbatical System

for these United States

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Unemployment is a curse upon society. Families of the unemployed face desperate situations which can quickly lead to the breakdown of society. It is equally distressing when unemployment afflicts so many young men and young women who, wasting time in a fruitless search for jobs, too often give up. At age 18 people are in their physical prime, and when 21 at a mental peak. The energy, creativity and eagerness of these young citizens need to be put to work. Their human potentials are too precious not to be put to productive use. In fact, the human potential for productivity should not be wasted at any age.

Most people who are now unemployed would welcome a job while others who have jobs would be only too happy to take a break. The following idea is submitted with the hope that it may catch the attention of someone within or outside government who can develop it legislatively. We can turn unemployment from a curse into a blessing. Simply, we can make "unemployment" something to be earned rather than spurned.

## **Rationale**

Everyone has the necessity to earn a livelihood, yet machines are replacing a large part of the workforce which normally earns the livelihood. Furthermore, unless all citizens have the income to sustain an acceptable standard of living, the country will lose potential consumers. A design needs to be found whereby everyone can share the work that needs to be done and thereby earn a livelihood and prime the economic pump. The design also needs to equitably share the blessing of periodic leisure which is now possible thanks to technology.

## **Factors to Consider in the Design**

- a) Size of the workforce - the number of citizens able to work
- b) Number of jobs - the current number of filled job positions
- c) Capital resources - the capital generated by the employed workforce and available to support the entire economic system

## **The Design**

SABBATICAL CREDIT would be established by legislation. It would be earned by working citizens. The CREDIT would be redeemable in a flexible system— i.e. as

annual vacation time,  
sabbatical leave, or  
early retirement.

Time off would become time earned. Instead of an unwelcome circumstance with a stigma of failure, the individual given time off would design his or her own period of "unemployment." Some might use it each year for vacation. Others might wish to accumulate time to be used for returning to school, travel, or a special sabbatical project. Those who are happier with a continuous work schedule would be able to work until early retirement. Or, they may choose to work on and on and never redeem the credit. The system would enable youth to go to work before earning time off.

Such periods of earned unemployment are not new. We call them "vacation," "sabbatical leave," "leave of absence," "early retirement," "maternity leave," etc. The proposed system would simply extend and systematize the time off so that all citizens would benefit from it and youth would work before earning it.

TIME EQUIVALENT of the SABBATICAL CREDIT would be set annually by the Department of Labor. It would be determined by the current ratio of JOBS/WORKFORCE. Many industries now have

vacation ratios of 2/52 (2 weeks out of 52) or 1/12 (1 month out of 12). Teachers have a ratio of 3/12 (three months out of twelve) while professors normally receive 1/8 (1 year after 7). These established ratios are set by a different system, however, driven by the profit motive, tempered by collective bargaining, or possibly influenced by some form of altruism. The goal of the Flexible Sabbatical System would be broader in scope: to assure that everyone has access to a job and a livelihood and shares in the benefits of leisure time. Such a design is necessary for a productive and stable society.

No one would be forced to work or to accept a leave from work in the flexible system. The good aspects of the free market would be retained. But, there would be strong incentive to enter the workforce and thus earn leisure time. Those who choose not to participate would have less sympathy from Uncle Sam inasmuch as opportunities for work would have been created—unemployment payments would be eliminated.

The FILL-IN, a new occupation, would be created. There would be a much greater demand for people with the special skills to take over someone's job while they are on leave, carry it on temporarily, and leave it in good shape when the person returns. This, too, is not a new idea. In government, industry, and education there are often temporary people working. In top positions they are called "acting" or "interim" president, director, etc. Shifts would often be made within an enterprise to cover the vacancy. Such changes often have beneficial effects.

CREDIT PAYMENTS would be made to individuals when the SABBATICAL CREDIT is redeemed. The size of CREDIT PAYMENTS would depend directly upon the amount of income reported on a person's Income Tax Return (think about the implications of this)! A RATE OF PAYMENT would be set legislatively each year to reflect the economy's ability to support the system. If a person's income were reported at \$4,000 per month and the RATE OF PAYMENT were determined to be 90%, the CREDIT PAYMENT would be \$3,600.

Sometimes the RATE may need to be set low, say at 50% but then again it might rise to 200% if the economy is heating up. Payments would not be made if the person took other employment. These payments would replace our current need for unemployment benefits, as unemployment would become obsolete. Payments would vary according to the annual income from wages, salaries, and business profits reported on the Income Tax Returns. CREDIT PAYMENTS would not include income from dividends or interest—only from income generated by a productive position held in the job market would be given SABBATICAL CREDIT.

OWNERS, self-employed people (e.g. farmers, business owners), would have two options in requesting a FILL-IN to operate their farm or business during a leave:

1. The FILL-IN would receive the CREDIT PAYMENTS or a STANDARD SCALE paid by the government thus allowing the OWNER to retain the profits and take the risks;
2. The OWNER could receive the CREDIT PAYMENTS based on the tax returns and the FILL-IN could receive the profits he or she generated and take the risks that go with them.

SABBATICAL OFFICES would need to be established. Obviously, parts of this system would require supervision and negotiation. The system is meant to be flexible so that each person can arrange what is feasible in their situation. A network of SABBATICAL OFFICES would replace the current Unemployment Offices. Their responsibilities would include the following:

- 1) Take applications for SABBATICAL CREDIT.
- 2) Approve applications or request modifications.
- 3) Arbitrate between employers and employees when they disagree over timing of redemption, etc.
- 4) Develop training programs to teach fill-in skills.
- 5) Establish a core of certified relief workers to undertake work when emergency help is or in OWNER situations where the relief

person must be unusually responsible is in a possibly unsupervised situation.

6) Create a small public works and training project to pick up the slack that may appear with special attention to work suitable for those suited to the normal job market.

7) Monitor each applicants sabbatical use. Payments are to be made only to persons vacating a job and are to be withheld if the person on leave takes gainful employment. Those wishing to take gainful employment may do so but will not receive CREDIT PAYMENTS.

### **Cost of the Program**

This program should not require more funds than our present system. It merely shifts unemployment benefits to sabbatical payments, gives an opportunity to those who are unwillingly unemployed to find a job while releasing those who would be pleased to take a leave of absence. The administrative costs of the current system would be shifted to administer the FLEXIBLE SABBATICAL SYSTEM. Since the system has a built-in incentive for full reporting of income, the plan may even realize greater tax revenues.

### **Considerations**

In many ways, the FLEXIBLE SABBATICAL SYSTEM is little different from the present one. It does not change the WORKFORCE nor the number of JOBS available. It does spread the JOBS out among all in the WORKFORCE, thus eliminating unemployment. This is the critical difference. People will earn the right for time off and youth will put their energies to use in real work, gaining the experience which only work can give. Those who have earned time off will have opportunities for study, relaxation, rejuvenation and self-improvement. They will return as more productive workers. The system's flexibility upholds the fine American traditions of independent judgement and freedom of choice in a world which is becoming more and more interdependent. The plan allows all to share the rewards and responsibilities of the world of work. Sabbatical periods bring additional reward, as many

organizations have known for years. Those on leave return with new ideas, new energies and new interests. Relief workers also bring new approaches, skills and insights with them. These are all important ingredients in a healthy economy and an enlightened society.