

Open Forum 2

Web Site Transcript

Chapter 6

A = Rachel Hunt, radio host

B = Barbara Cassidy, studio guest

C = Nathan Grant, studio guest

D = Mervin, call-in listener

A: You're listening to The Great Debate. I'm Rachel Hunt. Americans work more hours and take less vacation time than Europeans do. Today we'll be debating the question: "Should the United States reduce the work week to 35 hours?" I'm joined by one guest on each side of this issue. Barbara Cassidy, professor of social studies at the University of Philadelphia, supports the reduced work week. Dr. Cassidy, welcome.

B: Hello.

A: And across the table is Nathan Grant from the Association of American Businesses, a group which opposes this plan. Mr. Grant, good to have you with us.

C: Thank you.

A: Dr. Cassidy, let me start with you. Would we be happier with a legal limit on the work week?

B: Yes, Rachel, we would. I've interviewed hundreds of workers on both sides of the Atlantic, and there's no doubt that increased leisure time leads to greater satisfaction and overall happiness. I'm not saying that everyone in Europe loves their job—they don't!—but on average Europeans have less job-related stress, and they're more focused on health, family and simply enjoying life than Americans are.

A: Nathan Grant, do you believe Americans are unhappy?

C: Certainly not. I don't know who the professor spoke to and how she's measuring happiness, but I can tell you this . . . Americans work hard because they want to. This is the land of opportunity, and if you put in the hours, you can build a better life for yourself and for your children. Limiting the number of hours people can work is just going to limit the financial and social opportunities of ordinary Americans.

B: Unemployment is over 10% in some parts of the U.S. If you require a shorter work week, then companies will be forced to hire more workers. This will create more jobs, which is good for people and it's good for the country.

C: But it's bad for business, because with higher salary costs, small businesses will be forced into bankruptcy . . . they won't be able to stay in business . . . and then they won't be able to offer any jobs at all.

A: Let me stop you there because I know a lot of listeners want to join in in this conversation. Mervin in Detroit—you're on The Great Debate.

D: Rachel, what I want to say is this: I've worked in the automobile industry for 30 years. I've worked 50 and 60-hour weeks, just to put food on the table and a roof over my family's head. And I was proud to do that. But I don't want that life for my kids, so I'm in favor of the 35-hour work week.

B: Mervin, I respect your attitude. There's just no need to sacrifice our lives and the lives of the next generation for work.

D: Can I say something else? I live in Detroit—one of the most overweight cities in America—and I know from looking at my friends and family that we eat too much fast food . . . and that's because we don't have time to cook healthy food . . . because we work too much.

B: That's really important. The more we work, the worse we eat—less nutritious food, more fat, fewer fruits and vegetables. The American life style just isn't healthy.

A: What do you think about that Mr. Grant?

C: Well, it's true that many Americans do not eat as well as they should, but working fewer hours would not solve that problem. In fact, a 35-hour week would reduce the income of most working-class Americans . . . and that would reduce the quality of their diet. People can't eat healthy if they're not making enough money to afford healthy food!

B: I have to disagree . . . People can't eat healthy if they don't even have any time . . . time to cook or eat at home with their families. Reducing the work week to 35 hours would help people live healthy, more active and satisfying lives.

A: Thanks for your call, Mervin. Let's take a break and then take some more calls . . .