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2021 Labor Day Facts – Travel, Money & More

John S Kiernan, Managing Editor Aug 30, 2021



Labor Day in the 21st century is all about beaches, BBQs, ballgames and buying things, but the holiday was very subdued last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, with a majority of Americans vaccinated, the festivities will be a lot bigger. For example, 53% of Americans plan to get out of town for Labor Day weekend. More than 160 million will enjoy a cookout. And thousands will pack college football stadiums.

But it hasn't always been that way. Labor Day's roots can be traced back to the streets of 1880s New York City, where rival union leaders joined forces to protest the unfair labor practices that plagued industry at the time.

This is not meant to take the wind from your sails as you enjoy one last dip in the summer sun. Rather, these Labor Day facts may help you cherish the holiday even more. Its place on the calendar is uniquely American – most other countries celebrate labor in May. And there's ample reason for celebration, considering the industrial fatality rate has fallen by roughly 77% since the early 1900s.

So WalletHub gathered the most entertaining, educational Labor Day facts we could find to create this infographic. You can also check out the [Ask the Experts section](#) that follows for a panel discussion on the many facets of Labor Day.

Top 5 Labor Day Facts for 2021:

57% of Americans left vacation days unused in 2020.

42% of organizations have made or plan to make changes to time-off policies in light of the pandemic.

818 hot dogs are eaten every second from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

More than 627,000 workers' lives have been saved since the Occupational Safety and Health Act was enacted in 1970.

\$250+ Billion is the annual cost of worker injury and illness in the U.S.

Ask the Experts

To gain a better understanding of the biggest issues facing workers today and how they're likely to evolve in the near future, we posed the following questions to a panel of labor experts. You can check out their bios and responses below.

1. What are the biggest threats facing working people today?
2. How is the “gig economy” changing the nature of work? Should “gig economy” workers be treated like traditional employees or do we need new labor regulations for this growing sector?
3. What policies should governments and firms adopt to improve the quality of life of American workers?
4. How likely is it that the next Congress will pass new supports for workers, including an increase in the Federal minimum wage or mandatory paid family medical leave?
5. What tips do you have for people that are planning a getaway for the Labor Day weekend?

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Erin J. Hendrickson

Professor of the Practice of Law – William & Mary Law School

What are the biggest threats facing working people today?

When I talk to people in the workforce, the two biggest concerns I hear focus on work/life balance and compensation. Parents, especially, are burnt out from the last year and a half of working while simultaneously managing kids at home. Even now, they worry about potential unexpected shifts to remote learning and whether their employers will continue to be as flexible now as they were during the height of the pandemic. For many people, the pandemic has also been a time of introspection. As technology has evolved, many workers are now expected to be “on” all of the time, even when they are away from the workplace. Many are now realizing that they would rather allocate more of their time to other aspects of their lives.

At the same time, with soaring housing prices and rising inflation, many workers worry about their financial security. College grads are also often saddled with huge amounts of student loan debt. And, of course, this is to say nothing about longer-term financial security. Pensions are becoming a rarity. Defined contribution plans are much harder for workers to plan a retirement around since they are subject to the stock market and because it is difficult to predict how many years you will need that money to last. And, of course, the workers who have retirement plans at all are already the fortunate ones. Many workers do not have such plans available to them or cannot afford to contribute to them.

How is the “Gig Economy” changing the nature of work? Should “Gig Economy” workers be treated like traditional employees, or do we need new labor regulations for this growing sector?

Most gig economy workers are currently considered “independent contractors” rather than employees. However, I expect that we will continue seeing litigation and debate over this issue in the coming years.

What policies should governments and firms adopt to improve the quality of life of American workers?

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused many employers to reevaluate their policies and workplace expectations. Even as employers start to envision an eventual return to “normal,” I think we will see more and more of them continuing some Covid-era measures, such as flexible work schedules, opportunities to work from home, and reduced travel. Employers will likely see these policies as a win/win since they can increase employee satisfaction while also reducing costs in some cases.

Of course, when we talk about these sorts of changes, we often default to thinking about office workers. Perhaps an even more important question is how we can effect equally meaningful change for workers whose jobs do not afford the luxury of working from home on a flexible schedule. Reducing the standard 40-hour workweek seems to be one possibility. But, of course, to truly improve the lives of workers – esp. low-wage workers - this change would have to come without a reduction to overall pay or benefits, which could be a hard sell in the U.S., especially as relates to hourly employees. Expanded leave policies could also help. Paid parental leave is a logical and necessary starting point. Employers should also reconsider their sick leave and leave without pay policies. While employers rightfully want to ensure that employees do not abuse the system, it is also not in society’s best interest to encourage workers who have exhausted their leave to report to work when they have the flu, for example.

How likely is it that Congress will pass new supports for workers, including an increase in the Federal minimum wage or mandatory paid family medical leave?

I do not know that I would go as far as to say that any sweeping changes are especially likely, but overall chances are probably better now than they were pre-pandemic. And, of course, many states have addressed or can address these issues as well.

What tips do you have for people that are planning a getaway for the Labor Day weekend?

Wear a mask, put down your phone, have fun, and spend some time thinking about what you want your relationship with work to look like in the coming years.
