

Roth: A two-day workweek?

By [Jim Roth](#), Director and Chair of the Firm's Clean Energy Practice Group. This column was [originally published in The Journal Record](#) on May 2, 2016.



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A two-day workweek?

History and science tell us that a year is based upon Earth's one full revolution around the sun and that months on the calendar were designed to measure the time between full moons, yet the seven-day week seems to be something left over from Babylonians' belief in seven planets in the solar system.

Well, we now know that belief, albeit 4,000 years old, is not accurate, since we have eight recognized planets (sorry Pluto), yet the seven-day week continues.

I have often wondered how America (and the world) ended up with an established five-day workweek and a two-day weekend. I

mean after all, if the economy stabilized on this 5-and-2 split, wouldn't it just the same stabilize over time if there was a two-day workweek and a five-day weekend?

It wasn't until early in the 20th century in America, in 1908, when an American mill became the first factory to offer a two-day weekend to accommodate both Jewish and Christian workers, forcing other factories to soon follow and a century later here we are.

Over the years, observers, sociologists and economists have predicted that advancements in technology would lead to Americans working shorter hours, perhaps even less days, which would lead to increased productivity, better health, superior performance and greater job satisfaction. Even visionaries such as Google co-founder Larry Page have suggested shorter workweeks would likely increase productivity, yet they and all the rest of us seem to be working longer hours than ever, with no change in sight.

However, due to very unfortunate circumstances impacting Venezuela and its crumbling economy, the drought-stricken country has just announced a two-day workweek and a five-day weekend for its public sector employees, which are apparently a third of the country's workforce.

Daily blackouts at the country's largest hydroelectric plant have seriously interrupted their fragile economy and led to energy rationing. Without electricity, factories are idled, food is spoiling and schools remain closed without lights. And there does not appear to be any relief in sight soon.

As El Nino weather brings historic rains and flooding to parts of the Northern Hemisphere, it has led to crippling droughts in the south. Water levels are dangerously low at the Guri Reservoir, the 11th-largest man-made lake in the world, which feeds the country's Guri Power Plant, with over 10,200 megawatts of capacity. It's the fourth-largest power station

in the world and provides about two-thirds of the country's power. To give us some point of reference, in Oklahoma if you combined the state's two largest public utilities (OG&E at approximately 6,000 MWs and PSO at approximately 4,500 MWs), this one power station is comparable to all of these utilities' power plants, combined.

So while crisis has caused the implementation of scheduled rolling blackouts, four hours a day in much of the country, public sector employees will be experiencing five-day weekends until the energy and economic crises subside. Whether that proves to increase productivity, as some economists suggested a century ago, is an open question.

For now, it's a sad reality, made worse by government leaders who haven't moved to diversify their energy economy, considering they have enormous potential for wind energy (estimated to exceed 10,000 MWs) and the country famously sits on the world's largest proven oil reserves, totaling 297 billion barrels as of 2014.

Perhaps Oklahoma's budget crisis pales in comparison to the conditions in Venezuela, but there is no time like the present to make sure our state's economy makes the most of our wind and solar energy potentials, in addition to growing reliable demand for our native oil and natural gas.

But then again, I've always been curious about whether a five-day weekend could "work" in America.

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