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## **Labor Day: Celebrating the American Worker**

JEFFERSON CITY — Labor Day is Sept. 7. For many, it's the official last long weekend of the summer, but more importantly it's a day to recognize and celebrate the American worker. And according to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, that includes approximately 155.1 million Americans ages 16 and up who make up the nation's current labor force.

Labor Day is celebrated all over the world. In the majority of places, it's celebrated on May 1 and called May Day or International Workers' Day. The U.S. and Canada are among those that celebrate the holiday on the first Monday in September. Our country's first observance of Labor Day is reported to have occurred on Sept. 5, 1882, when a parade of 10,000 workers marched in New York City. By 1893, more than half of the states were observing a Labor Day in some way. The next year, Congress passed a bill to establish the federal holiday, with President Grover Cleveland signing the bill and designating the first Monday in September as Labor Day.

In the U.S., records show that Labor Day was first proposed as a holiday in 1882 by Matthew Maguire, a machinist and secretary of the Central Labor Union in New York, while other accounts claim it was proposed by Peter J. McGuire, general secretary of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and co-founder of the American Federation of Labor.

The origins of Labor Day are tied to the eight-hour day movement that is said to have originated as early as 1840 when New Zealand carpenter Samuel Duncan Parnell refused to work more than eight hours a day. He and a group of fellow carpenters reportedly said any worker offending the mandate "should be ducked into the harbour." Parnell was also recorded as saying: "There are twenty-four hours per day given us; eight of these should be for work, eight for sleep, and the remaining eight for recreation and in which for men to do what little things they want for themselves." This first strike was said to have been settled on the spot, and New Zealand is credited with being the first country in the world to adopt an eight-hour working day.

Other eight-hour movements ensued all over the world, including in the U.S., and not without some bloodshed. Many will remember from history the Haymarket Square Riot of May 4, 1886, in Chicago — considered to have been an important influence on the origin of international Labor Day and May Day observances for workers.

In 1867, the Missouri Legislature was among a handful of states that passed similar laws assuring an eight-hour work day. Congress passed an eight-hour law for federal employees in 1894. These laws had limited effectiveness, however, with loopholes and conflicting interpretations. It wasn't until 1938 when an eight-hour day was finally realized for many working Americans when the Fair Labor Standards Act under the New Deal made it a legal day's work.

Labor Day is a holiday for all American workers. It's an opportunity to celebrate our nation's strength, our well-being and our prosperity — even during these tough economic times — by recognizing and celebrating the remarkable economic and social achievements of our nation's vital work force. Enjoy your holiday, and thank you.

As always, if you have any questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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