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**Capitol View**

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**Somebody Tell Mother Nature That Summer Is Officially Over**

Labor Day has come and gone, the State Fair is over, and the University of Nebraska Cornhusker football team has shown they can lose a close game (again) on the world stage. Summer is officially over.

Time was when Labor Day marked the end of summer. Then it was the State Fair because students didn’t go back to school until the fair was over. In election years, the fair marked the start of the gubernatorial or senatorial debates. Not this year.

So, is Labor Day still relevant? The first Labor Day holiday was celebrated in 1882 in New York City. The Central Labor Union held its second Labor Day holiday just a year later. By 1894, 23 more states had adopted the holiday, and on June 28, 1894, President Grover Cleveland signed a law making the first Monday in September of each year a national holiday.

[Oregon](https://www.britannica.com/place/Oregon-state) became the first state, in 1887, to grant legal status to the holiday (although the state initially celebrated it on the first Saturday in June). That same year, Colorado, New York, Massachusetts, and [New Jersey](https://www.britannica.com/place/New-Jersey) established the holiday on the first Monday in September, and other states soon followed.

In 1894 the [Pullman strike](https://www.britannica.com/event/Pullman-Strike) in Illinois, as well as a series of unemployed workers’ riots on May Day in Cleveland, prompted U.S. President [Grover Cleveland](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Grover-Cleveland) to propose a bill that would make Labor Day a national public holiday. The bill, which was crafted in part to deflect attention from May Day (an unofficial observance rooted in socialist movements), was signed into law in June of that year.

According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate in Nebraska is now 2 percent, up slightly from a record low of 1.9 percent for most of the summer and well below the national rate.](http://www.bls.gov/cps/) The unemployment rate in Nebraska peaked in April 2020 at 8.2 percent, during the height of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Governor Pete Ricketts said recently that there are nearly 52,000 available job openings in Nebraska.

Have you timed the wait at a so-called fast- food restaurant recently? Have you counted the number of “help wanted” signs posted by these places? Have you noticed how many restaurants and other small businesses have been forced to close because of worker shortages?

With a low unemployment rate and the large number of jobs available, why are we facing worker shortages? And those shortages are everywhere in the business community, not just in food service.

Writing in *Psychology Today* magazine, Jane Adams noted the pandemic caused several significant social changes, one being attitudes about work; why we do it, the conditions under which we do it, the meaning and place it has in our lives and the impact it has on our families.

The social psychologist, writer and speaker said what the media on and offline calls the Great Resignation, and the social culture that refracts and reflects it preoccupies both employers and employees at every level from the factory floor to the executive suite.

Those who are rejoining the world of paid employment are demanding better working conditions, higher pay, and more say in company policies, and many are getting it, she said. The labor movement is stronger today than it has been in decades, enough so that even the threat of unionization or wildcat strikes is forcing businesses to listen to their demands.

But one of the many enduring lessons of the pandemic has been, as one told Adams, to realize that “I let the job define who I was for over a decade... In the last two years, I’ve learned that there’s much more to me than a cog in the machine.”

That person told her, “If there's one thing the pandemic taught me, it’s that life is unpredictable, short, and too precious to waste on work that doesn’t make me happy or the world a better place.”

Should we start calling it No Labor Day? Or will all or some of these folks start making the world a better place?

I’m skeptical. But I’m patient.

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*J.L. Schmidt has been covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for more than 20 years*.