



From the Director's Desk -

Closing Down: It is time for a 4-day Workweek for Essential Workers

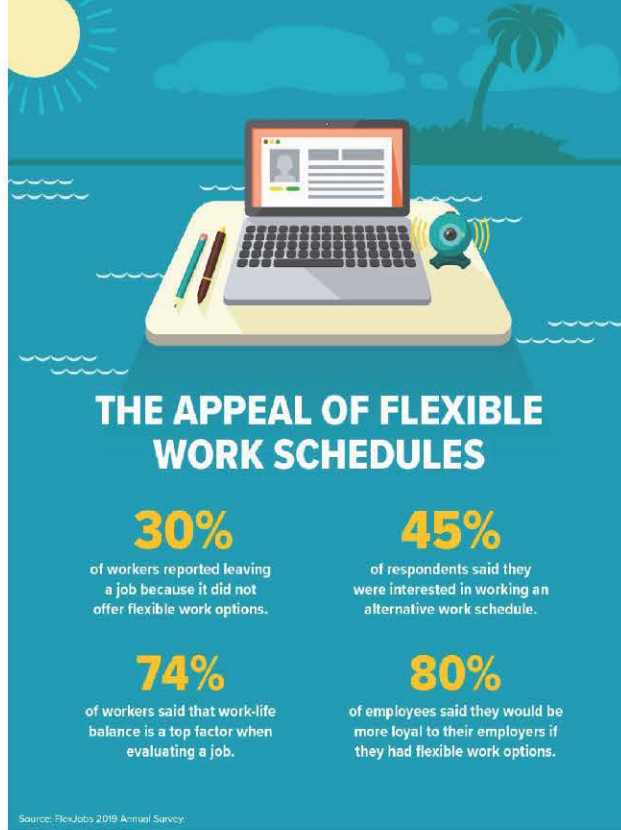
One trend we are seeing in service, retail and restaurant trades is places of business being closed during hours and days that they used to be open. This is often a result of “workforce shortages” which translates also to trying to prevent burnout from the few workers smaller businesses still have, or the owners themselves. For many of us fortunate enough to have shifted to remote work, the pandemic opened our eyes to how much time most of us were wasting travelling to meetings and to a central office. There is a trend toward a 4-day week.



I remember before my town had a chain grocery store, and only one fast food franchise when one fact of living in any mountain town was that for much of the weekend, everything closed down. I lived in another small town where the local restaurants negotiated for which was going to stay open after the tourist season closed so that the locals would have somewhere to eat, and competing businesses wouldn't each go broke. I drove 60 miles to get most of my groceries then, so I didn't go very often. Maybe some of our towns should go back to those expectations.

Washington Post columnist Christine Emba claims in her Opinion piece of the same title [We're Making the Wrong Argument for a four-day work week](#) that we should stop using productivity as an argument. To be clear, less is indeed more when it comes to this topic. She argues instead that employees are more engaged, committed and, yes, more productive than ever, but much more importantly, they are happier. Entire countries are moving in this direction—Japan of all places, Iceland and Spain. Emba claims, for many we “are judged mainly on what we produce...work has become central to our lives, a source of meaning and status.” We should work less so that work less defines us. Coloradoans should appreciate this at a gut level.

Shorter weeks are becoming common in some trades. About 30 of the 45 staffers at NWCCOG already work a compacted work week of “Four Tens.” Our Energy Program staff send field staff out across 13 counties. Energy staff consolidate work in more distant locations and utilize local lodging. When travelling, they would rather work long days to complete jobs. If they had to start a day in Silverthorne, drive to Steamboat Springs or Glenwood Springs, roll out, work, roll up and then drive back on an 8 hour day, the time they would actually have to perform work would be less than 4 hours. Not productive at all, and who doesn't appreciate a planned 3 day weekend every



weekend?

Some while back, before the pandemic, NWCCOG made the decision for Elevator Inspectors that it made more sense for them to begin each workday from their driveway with a company vehicle rather than commuting to the office to check out a vehicle before turning around. On a four-day template, they stagger schedules, sometimes on travel days they work more than 10 hours, knowing that they don't have to do that for 5 days each week, and that combined with flex time, they can re-balance their personal lives in ways that their peers often cannot.

For the rest of NWCCOG, without officially declaring a four-day week, we provide enough flexibility of schedule that workers and supervisors constantly negotiate their work schedules around their family, personal schedules, and recreation/travel plans rather than the other way around. Workers are a lot happier when they have enough time to take care of their personal business too. The old Colorado way was that we forgave "powder days" which was a guilty pleasure that could not be scheduled. The new Colorado way is to manage your own schedule to work when

you need, and schedule play when you can. Maybe Old and New Colorado should get together and agree on some days of the week when most of town is closed for business. It would be good for those we selfishly expect to be there all of the time. As they used to say in mountain towns, it might just keep out some of the riff-raff.

Jon Stavney

Executive Director - NWCCOG

JStavney@nwccog.org

Learning from political preferences correlating to different COVID approaches



I've been avoiding reporting out on this story for a while because I dislike reinforcing the idea that there is a "Red" America and a "Blue" America. There isn't. It is a corrosive construct. And also, because for some folks, even mentioning pandemic policy is now hyper- "partisan."

That said, evidently political preferences are a good indicator of behavior. The [NYT is reporting](#) that "In the most liberal cities" where people are still actively choosing to distance by avoiding restaurants and workplaces "the number of COVID cases has recently been somewhat higher." On the other hand, in

some of the reddest enclaves, lower vaccination rates are an indicator of higher COVID deaths. It has become something of a grand experiment. Will we learn anything from it?

The data is less easily correlated to the map than it is to political preference though there are some clear trends emerging that debunk conceits of both sides. Enough time as passed, and enough data collected during the Omicron surge that it is time to say this—a pox on both your houses' sacred ideas about pandemic policy.

For one, the Omicron surge has shown masking and distancing to be much less effective than we thought. [The Washington Post](#) highlights a Colorado school district that didn't contain COVID, and claims "the students did better." So, although we did what we thought had to be done at the time when we knew so much less by temporarily shutting down the country, perhaps *now that vaccines are widely available*

and anyone who wants one has had ample opportunity to do so, perhaps, just perhaps, we can look back and observe that we probably clung to our masks and protocols far too long. The damage of these policies was widespread, and Trump may have been right that collectively the cure was worse than the virus.

For another, the idea that COVID was no more dangerous than the flu was just flat wrong, and the idea that vaccines are ineffective is also dead wrong. The U.S. will soon surpass one million deaths that are directly tied to COVID and multiples more deaths will never be directly attributed to COVID but could be. This is disproportionately impacting red states and the elderly.

The last misunderstanding that seems to be common across political lines has to do with why vaccines, masks, distancing were all that were important in the first place. *These precautions were never just about protecting ourselves.* That is why looking at public health policy as an infringement of personal rights is a shallow argument. The canary in the coal mine was always hospital capacity and protecting the most vulnerable among us. The reason for taking precautions was to each do our part to protect the weakest links—we have learned that those links include communities, people as well as systems.

It has been a terrible and interesting experiment. We shall not soon forget (if we choose not to).

Project THOR Expands and Improves

Recently, [DOLA cited Project THOR](#) and its' sister middle mile broadband network in Region 10 as "Being of Significant interest to the State" in announcing the grant awards to both which will interconnect and enhance the two public, open access networks which cover much of the Western Slope of Colorado. The award to NWCCOG is \$2,195,758 which according to Regional Broadband Director Nate Walowitz, "allows the program to have stable and predictable business and financial models through 2027 and beyond. This model also corrects startup business model liabilities that the first network operator created that enabled us to get up and running within our cost constraints."

For the 12 Meet-Me-Center host communities who collectively pay the operating costs of the network through NWCCOG, the improvements are robust. Each will now be 100 gig up and down capable, and the redundant paths that make the network uniquely situated to continue service during a fiber cut in any single location are being upgraded and reinforced as well. Project THOR supports local community broadband initiatives in Breckenridge, Aspen, Vail, Steamboat Springs and Glenwood Springs among other locations. Read the Memo to Council about the upgrades and see the map [HERE](#) on the NWCCOG website. Walowitz will be presenting the long-term budget for Project THOR at the upcoming NWCCOG Council Meeting on March 24th.

NWCCOG is hosting a Broadband Summit highlighting local projects from around the region right after the May 5th Economic Development Summit, starting at 2:30 in the afternoon. It should be a good opportunity to learn more about local broadband efforts from those who implement them, and from state officials who suddenly have a lot of Broadband funding to go around. The event will be held at the Silverthorne Pavilion.

Northwest Loan Fund Helps Mountain Pine Manufacturing to Expand



Trent Jones began in the logging business as an accountant just as the Colorado pine beetle epidemic was starting. Watching the ins and outs of the industry from that vantage point, he saw the opportunities that were available and wanted to take advantage of "outside the box" ideas that he noticed on the horizon. He decided to go into the industry as an owner, created detailed business plans for a successful business, and even had excited investors lined up – which didn't materialize as hoped.

He raised money from family and friends, but ultimately was not enough to have a fully capitalized endeavor – he struggled for a few years.

Jones knew there was a market for high value mulch made from the outside of beetle-kill lumber, while he could also make lumber from the heart of those same trees, and that was when he was introduced to Woodstraw™. He immediately knew this product was the most effective answer to land reclamation projects for roads and highways, abandoned mines, construction sites, superfund sites, and others who

need to reseed and restore large-scale projects. He just needed working capital to get things off the ground.

Engineered Wood Strand Mulch or Woodstraw™ was invented by the US Forest Service in a lab setting as a superior erosion control replacement for straw erosion blankets and sprayed hydro-mulch— especially for steep slope reclamation. This was exactly the outside the box idea that allowed Jones to add value to low-grade, small dimension logs, which will increase profits for the entire operation.



With a cash infusion, he'd be able to bring his ideas to fruition. The answer came to Jones while attending CMC studying in the Entrepreneurial Program when he was pointed in the direction of the Northwest Loan Fund (NLF). Working with Anita Cameron, Director of Business Lending, he said..."was an awesome process. She asked all the right questions, and saw the potential of increased jobs, and reduced waste." After he received the NLF loan, he remarked, " For the first time, I feel like we're fully capitalized."

The loan enabled him to purchase equipment, increase the number of employees and provide full time work, rather than the seasonal work that had previously plagued the operation. Woodstraw™ is heavily manufactured for two months in the spring, then two months during the fall because restoration follows the planting cycle. With the additional equipment made possible by the loan, Jones says he can smooth out the workload providing better stability for his employees, products for his clients, and reduced waste. The loan has been a win/win – for the business, for his clients, for the employees and for the environment. If you would like to learn more about Woodstraw™ you can email Jones at Trent@mpinem.com.

The NLF is pleased to have been able to make this expansion loan.

Heard around the Region

I want to share Region 12 kudos. I can't say enough great things about the Region 12 team. Amanda (Rens-Moon), Ceci (Peterson), and Erin (Fisher) have all been wonderful collaborators. They all have been so incredibly helpful and welcoming to me in my role, and they were integral to the work we did on data and assessments last year. Amanda coordinated the work group, wrote our new Client FAQs, and met with Doug and I one-on-one multiple times. She also always helped Doug with testing new reports in PeerPlace BI, among other PeerPlace stuff! Ceci participated in our work group and also helped me verify that Spanish translations of our assessments would make sense for the clients we serve. The list goes on! I also appreciate that Region 12 takes things on that really benefit all AAAs.

Erica Reinhard
Program Evaluator
Division of Aging and Adult Services
Pronouns: she, her, hers



COLORADO
Office of Adult, Aging &
Disability Services
Division of Aging & Adult Services

Save The Date

Save the Date!
NWCCOG Regional Economic Summit
Thursday, May 5 at the Silverthorne Pavilion
8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
More details to come!

[CLICK HERE TO SEE DRAFT AGENDA](#)

Full Council Meeting, EDD Board Meeting

Location: Zoom Conference Call, On-site location TBD

Time: Council 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM - EDD 12:30 PM - 2:30 PM

Primary Agenda Items: Approval of final 2021 financials; program overviews; Member Handbook; approve January minutes