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## **Opinion: As we live longer lives, we must prepare for longer careers**

The human species' centuries-old dream of achieving longer life is finally coming to fruition. Between 1900 and 2000, antibiotics, organ transplants, better nutrition, immunization and other advances pushed the average life span at birth from 47 to nearly 80. Countries such as Monaco and Japan enjoy an average life expectancy near 90. Nanotechnology, genetic engineering and stem cell science promise to extend the life span even further.

Longer and healthier life spans enable us all to enjoy novel experiences, expand our social networks, pursue second careers and guide the lives of our grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

However, this "superlongevity revolution" also presents society with a host of unique challenges, the greatest of which might be in the arena of work and careers. The bedrock of our nation's prosperity is its workforce — the citizens who produce goods and services, pay the taxes and support programs such as Medicare and Social Security. Americans participate in that workforce from their late teens or early 20s to roughly 60 to 65 years old.

That pattern was fine when people lived until 63 or 64. However, because Americans are now living to 80, 90 and beyond, those retiring between 60 and 65 can bank on living for 20 or 30 postretirement years, earning and producing little and depending on pensions, savings and government safety nets for support.

As people live longer, year by year the retiree cohort will grow larger relative to that same 25-to-60 work group. Do we wonder why we have an emerging crisis in funding safety net programs? When Social Security was first instituted in 1935, there were 16 workers for every retiree. Now that ratio is closer to 2.5 to 1, and only 1.6 full-time workers for every retiree.

If current retirement patterns continue, those in the workforce simply won't be able to support the nonworking population. According to Boston University's Larry Kotlikoff, paying for Medicaid, Social Security, the Affordable Care Act and other programs over the next several decades will lead to a fiscal gap of more than \$200 trillion.

Even if we jack up full-time workers' tax rates, continue to run up the national debt and create trillions of new dollars out of thin air, the United States will continue to fall further and further behind in the battle to fund these programs.

If people worked longer, perhaps to 70 or 75 years old, we could begin to address these problems and set the stage for future prosperity. Every citizen would be spending 10 more

years contributing to the nation's gross domestic product, as well as to government programs. Employed seniors will be in a position to collect Social Security benefits at a later age and utilize their employer-based health insurance programs instead of Medicare.

Moreover, people who continue to work enjoy better physical and mental health than those retiring, according to research in the Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, as well as a 2010 University of Chicago project. A landmark 2013 French study of a half-million workers of retirement age found that workers staying on the job were less likely to suffer from Alzheimer's disease than retirees.

Surveys show that many prefer longer careers. The majority of Baby Boomers polled by the National Council on Aging stated that, given a choice, they would remain in the workforce rather than retire.

Employers will most certainly benefit if workers extend their careers. Recent research revealed that mature workers in their 60s are more reliable, consistent and motivated than those in their 20s. A just-released Associated Press-National Opinion Research Center study found higher job satisfaction among older workers than younger workers and, as every manager knows, a satisfied worker is a productive worker.

Older workers were less likely to jump ship at the next attractive job offer. Mature employees can serve as mentors, guides and teachers to younger employees. Businesses could offer mature workers needing a breather from their jobs and careers short sabbaticals instead of retirement.

The president and governors should use their bully pulpits to encourage employers to hire and retain mature workers. Government leaders can explain that companies that lay off a mature worker or fail to hire a senior applicant put further pressure on the nation's safety nets, hastening the day when the company and its younger workers will be paying for such a decision through higher payroll and other taxes.

Companies should remember that by adhering to existing age discrimination laws, they are helping to prevent a fiscal crisis. After all, every senior they employ will be adding to, not subtracting from, the country's economic pie.

Moreover, our laws and attitudes must become more accepting of the use of the expanding number of human enhancement technologies that help individuals at all ages function as healthier and mentally sharper employees and citizens.

The superlongevity revolution has bequeathed to society a wealth of new opportunities for growth and progress. The time has come to recognize those opportunities and embrace them.

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