SSDA SERVICE STATION DEALERS OF AMERICA AND ALLIED TRADES

SSDA News

Service Station Dealers of America and Allied Trades

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SSDA-AT 2022 Roundup

By Roy Littlefield

SSDA-AT accomplishments in 2022:

● SSDA-AT played a significant role, individually and as a member of a number of coalitions, to ensure that our members got the resources and support that they needed through the COVID-19 pandemic, including promoting and strengthening the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program.

● SSDA-AT fought to keep the estate and gift tax exemption at its current level rather than the significantly reduced level proposed this year which would have cost successful small business and privately owned business owners and their key employees millions of dollars in taxes. Reducing the estate tax exemption would cause the owners of many privately held and small businesses (including ranchers and farmers) to be unable to pass the business on to another generation and/or would cause a significant monetary drain to pay for estate planning lawyers, accountants and the purchase of insurance to mitigate the impact of this reduction. SSDA-AT will be fighting in 2023 to make the current estate tax exemption permanent so that it doesn't automatically get cut in half as of January 1, 2026.

● SSDA-AT led the charge to fight the proposed elimination of the step-up in basis for assets going through an estate. This single proposal would have resulted in major new income taxes for the heirs of the owners of small and privately owned businesses. SSDA-AT educated other groups that did not understand the nuances of estate tax law and got them involved in the fight. We were able to help a number of key Congressional members understand that the impact of this bill would fall on millions of Americans – many of them middle or upper middle income taxpayers and certainly not only the very rich.

How to Recognize the Signs of Email Fraud

Cybercrime Is on the Rise

Cybercriminals are finding increasingly clever ways to infiltrate your business and compromise your security. Net Driven wants to make sure your shop is protected from harmful digital attacks.

You may be thinking, "Cybercrime only targets large corporations. I have nothing to worry about." However, every year one in five small organizations is a victim of cybercrime. Cybercriminals target smaller organizations because they assume that these businesses have fewer defenses in place to prevent cyberattacks.

"Well," you say, "is there anything I can do to avoid a cyberattack if it comes my way?" Good news, 100% of cybercrime can be prevented through the vigilance of your "human firewall." What is this resource? It's you and your team members, who can form an impenetrable barrier against cybercrime by knowing the types of attacks and how to address them.

Email Fraud

Did you know that 91% of data breaches are conducted through email fraud? Email allows cybercriminals to impersonate another entity as a means to connect with and extort your business. The most common type of email fraud is phishing.

"Phishing" is a fraudulent email that claims to be from a legitimate source in order to access sensitive information such as passwords and credit card numbers. For example, popular phishing angles include security alerts on your professional or private accounts, changes to your health benefits and HR announcements. But when you interact with these fraudulent emails, such as clicking a link or attachment, you could be compromising your private information and putting your shop at risk.

Recognize the Signs of a Phishing Email

Phishing emails have evolved to target specific emails by appearing highly personalized, such as addressing you by name or repeating some information about your position. It's important to always look twice at an email, as it can appear innocent at first but contain some telltale signs of fraud.

Here is a list of signs to identify a phishing email:

Fake "From" Email: Hackers often try to infiltrate businesses by impersonating a legitimate domain, such as a subscription service or vendor. Always make sure the "From" email is legitimate (e.g., ends in "@netdriven.com"). If you receive an email that seems out of the ordinary for your role (e.g., you work in sales but were billed an invoice), check with a coworker or supervisor to confirm that email is real and was meant for you.

Generic Greeting: Cybercriminals may not have access to your personal information, so they make do with generic email content. Openers such as "Dear Customer" may be a sign that the email was sent by a hacker.

Poor Writing: If you re-

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NET DRIVEN

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ceive an email that is riddled with mistakes like misspellings and bad grammar and punctuation. Remember, a credible business would not send you an email that contains poor writing. Now, you may not be surprised to receive this email from your coworker who doesn't use punctuation, but keep your guard up if you receive an internal email has a strange tone or seems out of the ordinary.

Urgent Content: Urgency is a common cyber-criminal tactic, as they're trying to fluster you into making a snap decision and walking into the trap. If you receive an unexpected email whose subject line urges you to open immediately or whose body message tells you to click on a link or download an attachment now, take a step back. Ask yourself, "Is this email asking me to do something out of the ordinary? Is there a legitimate reason I would need to act now?"

Fake Links & Attachments: Phishing emails use fraudulent links and attachments to breach your security walls and gain access to payment and contact information or slip a virus into your software. Doublecheck any links before clicking to determine the link structure looks normal and matches the email sender. Does the URL represent a real website and start with "HTTPS:"? Similarly, don't click on an unexpected of funny-looking attachment.

Tips to Stay Vigilant & Protect Your Business

Constant vigilance will prevent a security breach every single time. First, follow the three fundament steps of thwarting a cyberattack:

Stop: Check and doublecheck your incoming emails. Never absentmindedly click on an email.

Look: Look twice before you interact. Do you see any signs that the message is a phishing scam?

Think: Does this email look real? Is anything out of the ordinary?

Additional steps to prevent a security breach:

Create unique, complex passwords for every account & never share your password(s) with anyone.

If an email looks "phishy," contact the sender in a different way, such as by phone or visiting their website in a different browser.

Don't log into an account using a login link in an email. Go to the actual login page and enter your credentials there.

Use second-hand verification if you receive a strange email from a company or coworker. Make sure you always know to whom you're responding.

Don't click on an email attachment if you don't know what it's for or what's inside.

If you suspect an email is fake, report it as a phishing attempt to your email service provider immediately.

Bottom Line: Provide Security Awareness Training

Your team can be your greatest cyber security asset or your biggest vulnerability, depending on how prepared they are to recognize and navigate a security threat. We highly recommend providing security awareness training for your entire team, as trained employees are more likely to notice and report suspicious emails. Create guidelines for your team to follow in terms of identifying and reporting suspicious emails and other security threats.

Happy New Year from SSDA-AT!

EIA: US Oil, Gas Production Rose Modestly in Oct.

US crude oil production grew by 0.6% in October, the slowest pace since July, to reach 12.38 million barrels per day, the highest since March 2020, while US crude and petroleum products demand slipped by 55,000 bpd to 20.42 million bpd, the Energy Information Administration has reported. Gross natural gas production in the contiguous US edged up by 0.1% to a record 102.94 Bcf/d in October.

US Surges to Top of LNG Exporter Ranks on Breakneck Growth, Bloomberg

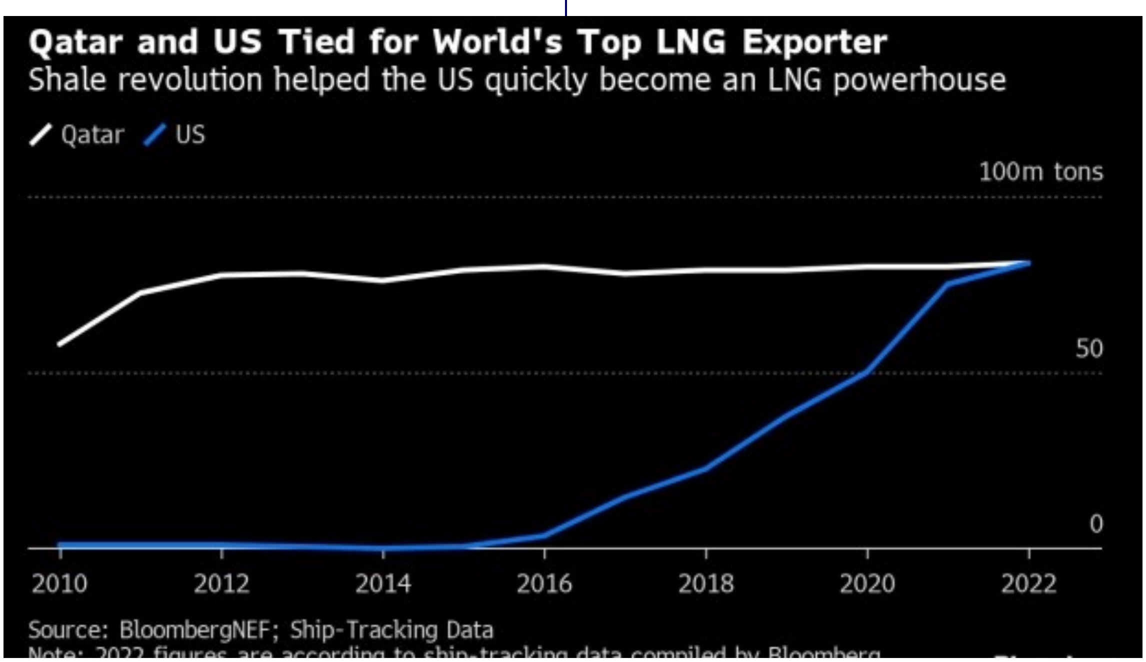
The US tied Qatar as the world's top exporter of liquefied natural gas last year, a milestone for the meteoric rise of America as a major supplier of the fuel.

Both countries exported 81.2 million tons in 2022, according to ship-tracking data compiled by Bloomberg. While that's a modest increase for Qatar, it marks a huge leap for the US, which only began exporting LNG from the lower-48 states in 2016 and has seemingly overnight become a dominant force in the industry.

A shale gas revolution, coupled with billions of dollars of investments in liquefaction facilities, transformed the US from a net LNG importer to a major supplier. The global energy crisis and a shift away from Russian pipeline gas has increased demand for US LNG, which could also help support construction of several new export projects across the Gulf Coast.

The US would have been the world's top LNG exporter if not for a fire at the Freeport export plant in Texas, which has kept the plant shut since June. The facility is slated to resume operations later this month, which will cement the US as the biggest exporter of the fuel.

Still, the US will need to build a lot more LNG export capacity if it wants to hold onto the top spot through the end of this decade. Qatar is in the midst of an enormous expansion to its production facility, which could solidify its position as the LNG leader from 2026. Australia is poised to remain as the world's third-largest supplier.



Election Results and 2023 Outlook

The voters defied historical expectations by keeping the Senate in Democrat hands and keeping the red wave in the House to a small ripple. Actually, it was the best mid-term for the party controlling the White House in 20 years. Prior to the election, Minority Leader Mitch McConnell publicly acknowledged that he was worried about winning the Senate because "candidate quality has a lot to do with the outcome." As it turned out, the voters agreed with him. While not true in all parts of the country, for most of the country the take away was that the electorate (particularly with the Senate elections where candidates were not dealing with a safe district like so many of the gerrymandered House districts) rejected extreme candidates and wanted a return to normalcy.

Prior to December 9th, the Senate ended up with 51 Democrats (really 49 Democrats and 2 Independents who caucus with the Democrats) and 49 Republicans by gaining one seat with Senator-elect John Fetterman in Pennsylvania. The House at this point has 221 Republicans and 213 Democrats, with the last remaining race to be decided likely to go to a Republican.

Just to keep things exciting on December 9th, Senator Kyrsten Sinema announced she was now a registered Independent, joining Senators Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Angus King (I-ME), both of whom caucus with the Democrats. Senator Sinema made it clear that she will be keeping her committee assignments so this change is not likely to change the way the Democrats in the Senate will be able to operate. Having 51 Senators means the Democrats will have majorities on the committees which will make it much easier for the operation of the committees.

Most Hill observers are expecting gridlock next year. The expectation as already expressed by many House Republicans in leadership positions is that they plan to investigate President Biden, the President's son (who has no position in the government), Hunter Biden, Secretary of Homeland Security, Alejandro Mayorkas, the January 6th committee, Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, as to why the Capital wasn't better protected on January 6th, the origin of COVID-19, the alleged politicization of the Justice Department, and many other issues and Democrats. Some Republicans have said that they are hoping these investigations will lead to impeachments of President Biden, Attorney General Merrick Garland and Homeland Security Secretary, Alejandro Mayorkas. This would lead one to think that nothing of substance will happen in the House as

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Election Results and 2023 Outlook

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far as meaningful bipartisan legislation.

But… what if the following groups in the House were able to work together -

- the Problem Solvers Caucus – a bipartisan group where there are 58 members with equal numbers of Republicans and Democrats, all of whom came to Congress to get things done and not get caught up with ideological fights, and are chaired by Representative Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ) and Representative Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), and

- the Republican Governance Group, chaired by Representative David Joyce, (R-OH) which is a centrist group with 44 members, and maybe

- the Blue Dog Coalition, 19 fiscally conservative Democrats, co-chaired by Representatives Ed Case (D-HI), Stephanie Murphy (D-FL), and Tom O'Halleran (D-AZ), and maybe even

- the Main Street Caucus, a group of 52 House Republicans who favor pragmatic governance, co-chaired by Representatives Don Bacon (R-NE), Mike Bost (R-IL) and Pete Stauber (R-MN).

Could they turn the 118th Congress into one where actual problems are worked on seriously in a bipartisan way? It's possible and that would be a pleasant surprise. Working against this are what are now being referred to as the "exotics" – the extreme right and left members of Congress who have little interest in working across the aisle. Almost all of these members come from "safe" districts meaning that there is no competition from the other party in that district so little incentive to work with the other party. In fact, working with the other party can be held against a member at the primary level in a safe district. Also, working against a productive House is the fact that control of the House keeps swinging back and forth almost every Congress primarily because the country is almost evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats – so why should a member from a safe district try to work in a bipartisan fashion when his/her party will likely control the next Congress and the legislation passed in the prior two years is likely to be thrown out during the next two years?

Energy Giants, Bill Gates Back Effort to Map 'Clean' Hydrogen, E & E

Many of the world's largest energy companies and a Bill Gates-led group are joining an industry-led initiative to measure and map the emissions footprint of "clean" hydrogen, underscoring the financial stakes linked to the fuel's climate profile.

The Open Hydrogen Initiative (OHI) was convened earlier this year by the Gas Technology Institute, S&P Global Platts — which is now S&P Global Commodity Insights — and the National Energy Technology Laboratory (NETL) (Energywire, Feb. 17). Since then, the Inflation Reduction Act established the first-ever production tax credits for lower-carbon hydrogen, lifting expectations among investors and advocates of the fuel.

The list of members in the initiative announced this morning include Gates' Breakthrough Energy; investor-owned utilities such as National Grid PLC, Dominion Energy Inc. and Duke Energy Corp.; oil and gas producers such as EQT Corp., Shell PLC and Exxon Mobil Corp.; and advocates at Hydrogen Forward, the Renewable Hydrogen Alliance and the Clean Hydrogen Future Coalition. Academics and think-tank researchers from the Clean Air Task Force, the Bipartisan Policy Center, Columbia University, Stanford University's Hydrogen Initiative and the government of Alberta, Canada, also are among the new backers.

The initiative wants to tap companies' knowledge to create protocols for measuring, reporting and verifying the greenhouse gas emissions associated with hydrogen production — including for methods that are rarely used now but could emerge because of the climate law's incentives, such as those that use processed waste as a feedstock. Once the protocol is complete, the group plans to use it to create an open-source catalog of hydrogen facilities' emissions.

The initiative's conveners say that level of transparency will be necessary to reassure global investors that "clean" hydrogen is really as clean as sellers claim.

"There's a global opportunity here with hydrogen," said Paula Gant, CEO of GTI Energy. But current models for hydrogen's emissions accounting "aren't sufficient to build a global market, to make investment decisions."

With laws like the Inflation Reduction Act, "you're starting to put a price on [hydrogen's] emissions. You're starting to put a dollar sign on them, because they matter," added Gant. "You need to have something like what OHI is doing that has evolved and is accepted globally."

In September, the initiative began looking into the blind spots and gaps in current models for emissions accounting, according to GTI and S&P Global. By the fourth quarter of 2023, its conveners hope to have a beta version of the measurement tool completed so it can be demonstrated on hydrogen production facilities in the United States.

Eventually, the protocols could become a useful tool for regulators as well, said OHI's

Energy Giants, Bill Gates Back Effort to Map 'Clean' Hydrogen, E & E

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organizers. "This is a fundamentally necessary step to put us on the path to hydrogen accounting," said Gant.

Letting 'the rubber meet the road'

Congress has provided the first broad definitions of what should be considered "clean" hydrogen. Perhaps most critically, the climate law said projects should not receive production tax credits unless they emit no more than 4 kilograms of carbon dioxide for each kilogram of hydrogen on a life cycle basis.

Congress left some unanswered questions on how hydrogen companies and the federal government should calculate and verify emissions, though.

The Treasury Department is currently crafting guidance that some environmentalists and emissions researchers have described as hugely important for hydrogen's future climate footprint (Energywire, Dec. 9). The Energy Department also is putting together a separate framework to judge the "clean" merits of proposed hydrogen hubs funded with up to $8 billion in infrastructure-law funds (Energywire, Sept. 23).

Those federal efforts have been contentious. Some green groups have criticized the agencies for allowing the hubs to emit any level of carbon. A wider variety of groups, including university energy modelers and clean energy advocates, have urged Treasury to close loopholes that would allow producers to generate hydrogen using high-emissions power from the grid.

"Never has something so wonky as emissions accounting frameworks been so eminently important," wrote Rachel Fakhry, a senior advocate for climate and clean energy at the Natural Resources Defense Council, in a Dec. 8 blog post.

The initiative's organizers said their industry-backed protocols could serve as tools for the carbon accounting being designed by Treasury and DOE.

"We're doing the digital equivalent of putting steel in the ground. We're building tools," said Zane McDonald, GTI's executive director for the initiative.

He and other organizers say they hope to draw on the latest emissions data from hydrogen facilities themselves, rather than using estimates from academic literature.

The OHI's protocols will consider emissions from "cradle-to-gate," which would start with emissions that come from the production of hydrogen feedstocks like natural gas and solar panels and end with the production of hydrogen itself, including leakage of the fuel that could take place at a manufacturing facility.

Over time, the initiative hopes that use of the protocols by hydrogen producers, in real-world situations, will improve the tools' accuracy. "If you build a car, you can't know if it works unless you turn it on. We're going to let the rubber meet the road," said McDonald.

Treasury and IRS Announce Guidance on Wage and Apprenticeship Requirements for Enhanced Credits / Deductions

The Treasury Department and Internal Revenue Service announced guidance providing taxpayers information on how to satisfy the prevailing wage and apprenticeship requirements for enhanced tax benefits under the Inflation Reduction Act. The guidance was published in the Federal Register.

Notice 2022-61 explains how taxpayers – generally builders, developers, and owners of clean energy facilities – receive the increased tax credits or deduction amounts by satisfying the wage and apprenticeship requirements as provided for in this notice. For instance, the notice provides guidance on what constitutes a prevailing wage and the determination of qualified apprenticeships with accompanying examples.

The publication of this notice on November 30th in the Federal Register begins the 60-day period in which taxpayers must begin construction of a facility (or installation under the rules for expensing energy efficient commercial building property) to receive the enhanced tax benefits without satisfying the prevailing wage and apprenticeship requirements as described in this notice.

Finally, this notice provides guidance for determining the "beginning of construction" (and "installation" for purposes of the rules for deductions for the cost of energy efficient commercial building property placed in service during the tax year).

Pipeline Section in Kansas with Oil Spill is Back in Service, AP

A pipeline operator put a damaged section in Kansas back into service, a little more than three weeks after a spill dumped 14,000 bathtubs' worth of crude oil into a rural creek.

Canada-based T.C. Energy announced that it had completed repairs, inspections and testing on its Keystone pipeline in northeast Kansas to allow a "controlled restart" of the section from Steele City, Nebraska, near the Kansas line, to Cushing, in northern Oklahoma. The 2,700-mile (4,345-kilometer) Keystone system carries heavy crude oil extracted from tar sands in western Canada to the Gulf Coast and to central Illinois.

A spill on Dec. 7 shut down the Keystone system after dumping 14,000 barrels of crude oil into a creek running through rural pastureland in Washington County, about 150 miles (240 kilometers) northwest of Kansas City. Each barrel is 42 gallons, the size of a household bathtub.

The U.S. Department of Transportation's pipeline safety arm gave TC Energy permission last week to restart the section of pipeline after telling the company that it would have to operate it at lower pressure than before. The company's announcement disclosed that it still is working to determine the cause of the spill.

"We recognize that incidents like this raise questions. We have questions too. We are committed to asking those tough questions, fully investigating and sharing our learnings and actions," Richard Prior, the company's president for liquids pipelines, said in an online message.

The rupture occurred on local farmer Bill Pannbacker's land, and he said he's bothered the company reopened the section of pipeline when "they haven't at least given an official cause" of the accident.

The company reported that as of last week, it had recovered almost 7,700 barrels of the spilled crude oil, or a little more than half. The company and government officials have said drinking water supplies were not affected. No one was evacuated, and most of the Keystone system was back in operation in eight days.

"We will not rest until we have recovered and remediated the areas affected by this incident," Prior said in his message. "No incident is ever acceptable to us."

The spill was the largest onshore in nine years and larger than 22 previous spills on the Keystone system combined, according to U.S. Department of Transportation data.

"If previous tests showed that everything was fine and now tests show everything is fine, yet we've had failures in between-time, what real assurance do we have that there is not another accident waiting to happen?" said Zack Pistora, who lobbies for the Sierra Club's state chapter.

Concerns that spills could pollute waterways spurred opposition to plans by TC Energy to build another crude oil pipeline in the same system, the 1,200-mile (1,900-kilometer) Keystone XL, across Montana, South Dakota and Nebraska. President Joe Biden's cancelation of a permit for the project led the company to pull the plug on the project last year.

No Death Tax Hikes in 117th Congress

Thank you for your support during another year of fighting back against a barrage of harmful tax hikes on family businesses.

SSDA's main focus was pushing back on language advanced by the House Ways and Means Committee, which would have cut the current unified estate, gift, and GST exemptions in half and wreaked havoc on family estate plans, making it harder to pass family businesses on to the next generation of ownership.

Many of our letters made a splash on the hill and in the media. In addition, we met with several critical offices (mostly moderate Democrats) with requests that they share their constituents' concerns with Democratic leadership. The small business and agriculture communities deserve a lot of credit for locking arms and digging in against these tax hikes. Chairman Neal decided against including the estate tax provisions in the House's BBB bill, telling Bloomberg that "enough members had raised concerns.." about the proposals.

In addition to the harmful House language, new ideas to tax family businesses seemed to come from all angles this Congress. Chairman Wyden, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, House Democrats, and the Biden administration all proposed changes that would have taxed unrealized gains both annually and at death. They threw everything at the wall, but as it stands now, the 2017 tax relief for family businesses remains fully intact.

118th Congress outlook

Over the next two years under a divided government, we expect some unpleasantness involving regulatory changes for family businesses. SSDA will stay highly vigilant regarding proposed changes to valuation discounts or GRATS. We have promised our continued support to Sen. Minority Whip Thune and Congressman Jason Smith on their bicameral legislation to eliminate the death tax (155 House and 37 Senate cosponsors currently) to solidify as much support as possible before Congress takes up tax reform again. SSDA will continue to make the case for tax permanence and full repeal of the unfair and economically destructive death tax while standing guard against new regulatory overreach. We are now one year closer to the expiration of most small business tax relief in 2025, and the work to achieve the best results in the next tax reform package must continue.

IRS Announces New Deputy Chief for the Taxpayer Experience Office

The Internal Revenue Service announced Courtney Kay-Decker as the new Deputy Chief Taxpayer Experience Officer.

Under the leadership of Chief Taxpayer Experience Officer Ken Corbin, Kay-Decker will lead IRS efforts to improve the taxpayer experience including driving the strategy for taxpayer interactions, monitoring and prioritizing the taxpayer experience, coordinating identification of taxpayer trends and best practices, and collaborating on the implementation of Service-wide taxpayer experience improvements.

"Courtney brings a wealth of experience in tax and proven skill managing programs designed to improve the taxpayer experience," said Ken Corbin, Chief Taxpayer Experience Officer. "Her career has ranged from practitioner to state tax administrator, volunteer tax preparer to tax law teacher. Each of these roles has helped her build deep knowledge of stakeholders in the tax ecosystem and will help her spearhead efforts to identify new strategies to improve taxpayer interactions."

Prior to her selection, Kay-Decker served as an attorney at Lane & Waterman LLP in Davenport, Iowa, where her areas of practice included tax and administrative matters. From 2011 to 2019, she served as Director of the Iowa Department of Revenue. As director, Kay-Decker focused on improving administrative rules, guidance, and processes to simplify and reduce compliance burdens for the taxpayers of Iowa. She also served on the Board of Trustees of the Federation of Tax Administrators.

Additionally, Kay-Decker served as the first state co-chair of the Identity Theft and Tax Refund Fraud Information Sharing Analysis Center, a collaboration among the IRS, state tax agencies and industry partners who work to develop tools and protocols to detect and prevent identity theft tax refund fraud. She's served as a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance site coordinator and as a member of the Electronic Tax Administration Advisory Committee.

Kay-Decker received her B.A. in Economics from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, and holds a J.D. with distinction from the University of Iowa College of Law where she also serves as an adjunct lecturer.

The Taxpayer Experience Office, formally established earlier this year, leads the effort to improve customer service at the IRS by focusing on six key strategies identified in the President's Executive Order on Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government, and the Taxpayer First Act Report to Congress.

WTO Rules Against Trump's Steel and Aluminum Tariffs, AP

The World Trade Organization has rejected the 2018 import taxes that then-President Donald Trump imposed on foreign steel and aluminum, saying they violated global trade rules.

Trump's tariffs of 25% on foreign steel and 10% on aluminum outraged America's long-standing allies, including the European Union and Japan, because he relied on a little-used provision of U.S. trade law to declare their steel and aluminum a threat to U.S. national security.

China and other trading partners challenged the tariffs at the 164-nation WTO.

In a ruling issued Friday, the WTO said it was "not persuaded" that the United States faced "an emergency in international relations" that would justify the tariffs.

The decision, however, will likely have little real-world impact. If the United States appeals the ruling, it will go nowhere. That's because the WTO's Appellate Body hasn't functioned for three years, ever since the U.S. blocked the appointment of new judges to the panel.

And the Biden administration already reached agreements with the EU, Japan and the United Kingdom to essentially drop the tariffs and replace them with import quotas under which the Trump taxes do not apply. In return, the trading partners dropped their own retaliatory tariffs against the United States.

Still, the Biden administration criticized the WTO decision.

"The United States strongly rejects the flawed interpretation and conclusions," said Adam Hodge, spokesman for the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. "The United States has held the clear and unequivocal position, for over 70 years, that issues of national security cannot be reviewed in WTO dispute settlement."

The WTO, he said, "has no authority to second-guess" the national security decisions of member countries.

Biden's trade team has attempted to find a balance between mending fences with U.S. allies angry over Trump's "America First" trade policies, and keeping tariffs that are popular with many U.S. steel and aluminum producers and their workers.

Christine McDaniel, a trade analyst with George Mason University's Mercatus Center, said the ruling against the Trump tariffs was not a surprise.

"Everybody knew that it was clear protectionism," she said. "Technically speaking, countries are able to act in their own self-interest when it comes to national security." The WTO just didn't buy the U.S. reasoning, she said.

Employee Well-Being: Culture is the Cure

By Richard Safeer

4 Trillion Dollars.

That's the cost of poor health and neglected well-being of Americans — most of whom are working adults. That's more than eight times the combined revenue of Apple and Microsoft in 2020. An unwell workforce contributes to medical and pharmacy claims, lost productivity, workers' compensation, absenteeism, paid disability and more. How much is your company paying for recruitment, and losing because of vacancies because employees have fled to find an organization that is more supportive of their well-being?

In some of the biggest organizations, healthcare costs are the largest items on their P & L accounts. Starbucks spends more on healthcare than it does on coffee beans. Even before COVID-19 entered our lives, chronic conditions and a lack of systemic focus on employee well-being had already created a significant problem.

As Jeffrey Pfeffer of Stanford points out in Dying for a Paycheck, 61% of workers felt that their workplaces had made them sick. Stress and overwork might be leading to over 120,000 deaths a year.

This is after spending billions on health care!

Don't forget that Americans aren't getting younger. An aging workforce means more chronic diseases and illnesses. Historically, the younger portion of any workforce has offset the higher cost of insuring their older colleagues. With a falling birth rate, and later retirement, that shell game is ending.

Balancing well-being and the bottom line

There's a lack of self-care nationwide, perpetuated by a propensity for immediate gratification over consistent good choices. Companies are fueling the deterioration of our well-being by focusing on quarterly profits and personal ambitions over the greater workforce community. The lack of investment in our human resources will not go unaccounted for long. In fact, reconciliation has already started.

For those employers not already positioned with a healthy and well workplace culture, the upheaval created by COVID-19 was the final straw to spawn the Great Resignation. Unless a culture of health and well-being becomes a strategic objective, organizations will be facing a full-blown crisis. If companies and organizations want to be successful, which means having a viable and reliable workforce, the time to act is now.

This isn't to suggest that companies haven't taken note. A multi-trillion dollar wellness industry has sprung up globally to address the problem. While business leaders and boards may be aware of the need to improve employee health and well-being, unfortunately, they rely on skin-deep programs with little meaningful effects. The current solutions of health risk assessments

Employee Well-Being: Culture is the Cure

By Richard Safeer

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and the well-being webinar of the day have demonstrably fallen short.

Leadership's role in a culture of well-being
By focusing on the individual and putting the onus on employees to change, organizations are willfully ignoring their own role in the health and well-being of their workforce. We cannot overlook the importance of the system that perpetuates unhealthy behaviors and thought patterns.

The current strategy for most organizations ignores the importance of the collective behaviors, attitudes and beliefs of the people who constitute the workforce. More simply, the current approach ignores culture.

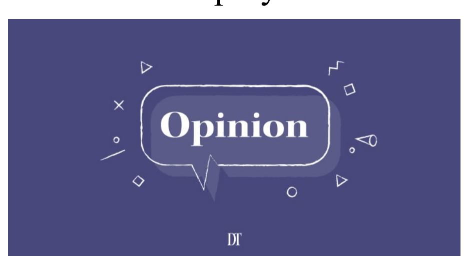
Katy Milkman of Wharton reminds us there are many obstacles to change. Working in an organization with a culture of health and well-being makes it easier to overcome these obstacles. To create a culture of well-being, organizations need to move beyond transactional tactics and transform their approach.

What's needed is a systematic overhaul, with long-term objectives, that includes the active engagement of all stakeholders. When there is a culture of well-being present, we don't need to "sign up" to participate because we are already immersed. We receive well-being when the policies, environment, benefits, resources, relationships and business practices are all aligned in a supportive direction.

A position like Chief Well-Being Officer sounds nice. It's easy to implement, and importantly, assigns responsibilities to an individual and their team. But cultural change requires the participation of everyone in the C-suite, including managers and team leaders. It also depends on how we treat each other — the person we're next to right now, regardless of title.

Let's face it. When promoted into your current position, was training to create a culture of well-being on your team or department part of your orientation? Was well-being even mentioned as part of the job? Lightbulb. How can organizations possibly create a well-being culture when leaders don't have the knowledge and tools to lead this change?

Organizations will have to invest in and focus on six building blocks to create a culture of health and well-being. In the next two articles, you'll learn more about these six culture-building blocks that not only support well-being and improve health, but will also increase job satisfaction, morale and employee retention.



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