

Utah may provide California with answers to 4-day workweek

By Jon Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

As Gov. Jerry Brown and labor unions negotiate to put state workers on a four-day, 38-hour workweek to cut payroll costs, they could learn a lot by looking east – to Utah.

The Beehive State's workforce went to a "four-tens" week in 2008. Then-Gov. Jon Huntsman, a Republican, launched the program aiming to save \$3 million annually in state operating costs by shutting down on Fridays.

The savings didn't materialize. Lawmakers ended the program last year over the objections of Huntsman's successor, GOP Gov. Gary Herbert.

In between, agencies didn't live up to promises they made to track the Working 4 Utah program. A state audit of the compressed workweek's impact paints a portrait of government struggling to hold itself accountable, groping to measure how the policy affected the productivity of 17,000 state employees.

"Very few departments tracked that," said Tim Osterstock of the Legislative Auditor General's Office, which issued a 2010 report on the program.

California's proposal differs somewhat from Utah's because it is designed to save money by cutting hours. Still, its experiment offers lessons for this state about the intersection of workplace policy and human behavior.

Utah employees, who hadn't received raises in several years, resisted the change at first but eventually embraced it, said

Todd Sutton, employee representative with the the Utah Public Employees' Association. The amount of leave employees took fell 4 percent during the program's first year.

Nearly 60 percent of Utah state employees told auditors they strongly agreed with the statement, "The nature of my work lends itself to a productive 10-hour day." Eight in 10 said they preferred the four 10-hour days per week. Only 10 percent said the compressed schedule made child care more difficult.

"Day care centers and businesses adjusted," Sutton said. "Nearly everybody did."

Still, about 4,000 Utah workers didn't switch to the new schedule because their jobs wouldn't allow it.

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