

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 16, 2010

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New Research from EBRI:

Older Workers Trending Toward More Part-Time Work

WASHINGTON—Reflecting the changing economic landscape, more older workers are staying in the work force, but increasingly in part-time rather than full-time jobs, according to new research released today by the nonpartisan Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI).

Using the latest U.S. Census Bureau data (for 2008), the EBRI analysis shows that an increasing percentage of older Americans are in the labor force: The percentage of those ages 55 or older in the labor force increased from 29.4 percent in 1993 to 39.4 percent in 2008, an increase of 10 percentage points. For those ages 65–69, the percentage increased from 18.4 percent in 1985 to 30.7 percent in 2006, up more than 19 percentage points.

However, while older workers working full time, full year increased steadily from 1993–2007, that trend ended with the recession year of 2008. While members of the older population were more likely to work in 2008, they were less likely to be working full time, full year in 2008 after consistent increases through 2007. The full report is in the March 2010 *EBRI Notes*, online at www.ebri.org

“These trends mark a significant change in behavior for individuals in these age groups,” said Craig Copeland, EBRI senior research associate and author of the study, “and are likely driven by their need to obtain affordable employment-based health insurance (as opposed to unaffordable or unavailable coverage in the individual market for those not Medicare eligible) and the need to continue to accumulate savings in employment-based defined contribution retirement plans (principally 401(k)-type plans).”

The article notes that workers who have access to retirement plans and retiree health insurance through their employment face increasing responsibility for contributing to these benefits. Consequently, they need to save more of their income for these purposes. The main option for doing that is to delay retirement and remain in the labor force, so as to postpone the need to pay these expenses and continue to accumulate savings.

EBRI’s research also breaks down the data by gender and age, finding that the overall trend (more part-time work) held for both men and women and generally for age (except that as workers are less likely to work full time as they age).

PR #869