



Just How Loud Does the Drumbeat Have to Get? Or, Can I Get An “Amen” For Governmental Action To Help The Gig Economy?

Insights

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An international crowd of approximately 60,000 people attended the Web Summit Lisbon last month where one of the most pressing questions posed during the conference was: “How do we create a future of work that works for everyone?” As it relates to the gig economy, a three-person panel attempted to answer that question. And one of the panel members (Richard Socarides, the Head of Public Affairs at Gerson Lehrman Group) recently wrote an article highlighting the six big picture takeaways from the panel discussion.

While all six points are instructive and on target, the two that resonated the most for me were:

1. Workers can’t be divided into employees and contractors. We need a new category.
2. Governments bear the ultimate responsibility of creating a gig economy that works for everyone.

I realize that the drumbeat on these themes is now new, but just how loud does the drumbeat have to get before we see meaningful action and change? And just where will we see change come from? Will one of the state legislatures be first or will the federal government take the lead?

Most everyone agrees that the current independent contractor/employee models don’t fit the gig economy. It is the classic “square-peg-versus-round-hole” analogy. But yet businesses playing in the gig economy space must continue marching on with the present system and all the potential liabilities that can come with misclassification. Just when will we get some relief?

In terms of legislative action from the government, Mr. Socarides put it this way: “As I learned in a long career at the White House and as a policy advocate, governments tend not to act until the political will becomes inescapable.” Here’s hoping that the drumbeat gets loud enough so that the political will becomes inescapable sooner rather than later.

And for those interested in the other four takeaways from the panel, they are:

1. We’re in a unique moment. Let’s act like it.
2. Gig economy doesn’t have to mean low-wage.
3. Companies need to evolve. Unions do, too.
4. We need to experiment.

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