



Globalization and the Politics of Pay: Policy Choices in the American States (American Governance and Public Policy series) (American Government and Public Policy)

Susan B. Hansen

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In the American federal system, states actively compete for jobs, business investment, and factory locations. Labor costs have played an important role in such interstate competition since the days of the pre-Civil War plantation economy. In recent years, however, global economic trends have put added pressures on businesses and government to reduce labor costs. At least, that is what most politicians, the media, and the business community believe.

Globalization and the Politics of Pay examines the economic, political, and social causes and consequences of declining wages in the United States. It challenges the conventional wisdom that globalization is to blame for the decline in workers' earnings. Susan B. Hansen presents a comprehensive analysis of the many factors affecting labor costs and concludes that many of them result from choices made by the states themselves through the laws and policies they enact. In addition, free-market ideologies and low voter turnout have had greater effects in keeping wages down than globalization. In fact, foreign trade and investment can actually result in higher pay in the state labor market.

In this rigorous yet surprising study, Hansen develops new measures of state and federal labor costs to test competing theories of the consequences of reducing wages and benefits. Most economists would argue that higher labor costs cause higher unemployment, and that reducing labor costs will lead to higher levels of job creation. But citizens and elected officials must weigh any employment gains in lower-wage jobs against slower state economic growth, declining personal income, and a less-competitive position in international trade. Cutting state labor costs is shown to have adverse social consequences, including family instability, high crime rates, poverty, and low voter turnouts. The book concludes with policy recommendations for state governments trying to balance their need for more jobs with policies to enhance productivity, living standards, social stability, and international competitiveness.

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