

Opinion: Workers need to be part of recovery

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By Pete McLinden

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Labor Day plans. Everyone has them. Parades, barbecues, picnics. This holiday is an opportunity for families, friends and colleagues to gather to mark the end of the summer and take a well-deserved break from their hectic lives. Too few of us, however, reflect on the true reason for the season – the real reason we celebrate this day. This Labor Day, let's remember the challenges that face the average Ohio worker and how we can begin to lift up all workers and create an economy that works for all of us.

Flat or declining wages have been a constant for workers everywhere for years, especially in our tri-state area. All the while, CEO pay has skyrocketed, resulting in widening pay gaps and levels of inequality unseen since the onset of the Great Depression. Ohio is no exception. In fact, Innovation Ohio, a progressive think tank, recently released a study which found that Ohio now has more low-wage jobs than higher-paying jobs for the first time since 2007.

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The study also found that while 9 out of 10 Ohio jobs lost during the Great Recession paid medium or high wages, low-paying jobs account for virtually all Ohio job growth over the last six years. This is not what a true recovery should look like for Ohio workers. The fact is, it doesn't have to be this way.

As the 2014 elections approach, the central economic concern for voters today is that their incomes are not keeping up with rising costs of living. Americans of all political stripes, whether they are progressives or members of the Tea Party, are looking for candidates who understand

their economic struggles. Working people want elected officials who will stand with us and speak for us, rather than with the wealthy and corporations.

Working families are fed up with the enormous amounts of money flooding our political system thanks to wealthy special interests. Ohioans want elected officials who will ask the wealthy and corporations to pay their fair share of taxes. Hard-working families are struggling to support themselves in this economy. We need politicians who understand the serious challenges posed by stagnant wages, high unemployment and disappearing benefits, and we need them to help the many families that are struggling to put food on the table and gas in the tank.

All candidates for office would be wise to adopt a working families agenda that raises wages, enacts family-friendly policies and invests in research, education and infrastructure to create good jobs that pay well, funded by closing tax loopholes. Moreover, politicians must support working families when they are in office, not just when they are on the campaign trail, if they expect working families to support them at the polls. In short, we need more accountable and representative elected leaders, and less politics and finger-pointing excuses.

Today let us celebrate the hands that built this nation, and the only hands that can rebuild an economy that truly works for all of us. Happy Labor Day to one and all.

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