

OPINION



Letters to the Editor...

The Nugget welcomes contributions from its readers, which must include the writer's name, address and phone number. Letters to the Editor is an open forum for the community and contains unsolicited opinions not necessarily shared by the Editor. The Nugget reserves the right to edit, omit, respond or ask for a response to letters submitted to the Editor. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. Unpublished items are not acknowledged or returned. The deadline for all letters is noon Monday.

To the Editor:

I've learned for every challenge there are at least three solutions. I would like to give kudos to the *Nugget's* editor for suggesting the same in his February 4 editorial. "Come to the table with a problem, sure. Try to bring along a solution, too."

After learning of an approved paved trail to Crossroads in 2013, requests for dialogue had been rejected for nearly 6 months, until November 2013, when the Deschutes Forest Supervisor provided opportunity to submit an acceptable alternate trail location (bring a solution). Two proposals were submitted, to improve one of the two existing dirt trails along Highway 242.

Early 2014, there was acknowledgement of mistakes made in the trail project processes. Fast-forward to fall 2014, the Sisters District Ranger chose to withdraw her draft decision for the Sisters Community Trails Project.

John Allen, (trail) objection review officer, indicated it had become clear that a broader, community-led process would help with a clearer path. Allen supported the decision to withdraw, and anticipated future dialogue about the trails system in the community.

Sisters residents were offered opportunity to engage in a trail committee which was to form this winter. The Sisters District Ranger indicated that she provided the community list to Deschutes County Commissioner Alan Unger and to Chuck Humphreys, who offered to help with the community trails committee.

In last week's *Nugget*, STA President Humphreys describes his disappointment in "a victory of selfishness over the best interest of the community." It is insulting to area residents who invested time, offering solution with reasonable compromise. Had a broader

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Sisters Weather Forecast

Courtesy of the National Weather Service, Pendleton, Oregon

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
Sunny 56/33	Mostly Sunny 61/33	Mostly Sunny 60/34	Partly Sunny 58/34	Mostly Sunny 56/31	Mostly Sunny 51/na

The Nugget Newspaper, Inc.

Website: www.nuggetnews.com

442 E. Main Ave., P.O. Box 698, Sisters, Oregon 97759

Tel: 541-549-9941 | Fax: 541-549-9940 | editor@nuggetnews.com



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Robert B. Reich

American Voices

My recent column about the growth of on-demand jobs like Uber making life less predictable and secure for workers unleashed a small barrage of criticism from people who contend that workers get what they're worth in the market.

A *Forbes Magazine* contributor, for example, writes that jobs exist only "when both employer and employee are happy with the deal being made." So if the new jobs are low-paying and irregular, too bad.

Much the same argument was voiced in the late 19th century over alleged "freedom of contract." Any deal between employees and workers was assumed to be fine if both sides voluntarily agreed to it.

It was an era when many workers were "happy" to toil 12-hour days in sweatshops for lack of any better alternative. It was also a time of great wealth for a few and squalor for many. And of corruption, as the lackeys of robber barons deposited sacks of cash on the desks of pliant legislators.

Finally, after decades of labor strife and political tumult, the 20th century brought an understanding that capitalism requires minimum standards of decency and fairness — workplace safety, a minimum wage, maximum hours (with time-and-a-half for overtime) and a ban on child labor.

We also learned that capitalism needs a balance of power between big corporations and workers.

We achieved that through antitrust laws that reduced the capacity of giant corporations to impose their will, and labor laws that allowed workers to organize and bargain collectively.

By the 1950s, when 35 percent of private-sector workers belonged to a labor union, they were able to negotiate higher wages and better working conditions than employers would otherwise have been "happy" to provide.

But now we seem to be heading back to 19th century.

Corporations are shifting full-time work onto temps, freelancers and contract workers who fall outside the labor protections established decades ago.

So it's not surprising we're once again hearing that workers are worth no more than what they can get in the market.

But as we should have learned a century ago, markets don't exist in nature. They're created by human beings. The real question is how they're organized and for whose benefit.

In the late 19th century, they were organized for the benefit of a few at the top. But by the middle of the 20th century they were organized for the vast majority.

Yet since around 1980, even though the economy has doubled once again (the Great Recession notwithstanding), the wages of most Americans have stagnated. And their benefits and working conditions have deteriorated.

This isn't because most Americans are worth less. In fact, worker productivity is higher than ever.

It's because big corporations, Wall Street and some enormously rich individuals have gained political power to organize the market in ways that have enhanced their wealth while leaving most Americans behind.

That includes trade agreements protecting the intellectual property of large corporations and Wall Street's financial assets, but not American jobs and wages. Bailouts of big Wall Street banks and their executives and shareholders when they can't pay what they owe, but not of homeowners who can't meet their mortgage payments. Bankruptcy protection for big corporations, allowing them to shed their debts, including labor contracts. But no bankruptcy protection for college graduates overburdened with student debts.

Antitrust leniency toward a vast swath of American industry but less tolerance toward labor unions — as workers trying to form unions are fired with impunity, and more states adopt so-called "right-to-work" laws that undermine unions.

We seem to be heading full speed back to the late 19th century.

So what will be the galvanizing force for change this time?

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