

Other Views

Workers' jobs losing to politics

President Joe Biden wants to revitalize the nation's labor unions. At their peak, unions represented more than a third of American workers. Now, after several decades of continuing decline, less than 10% of workers in the private sector are part of organized labor.

The decline is partly because American manufacturing has moved offshore to escape a less-than-friendly business climate created by politicians. But it's also because over the years, union leadership has cozied up to progressive politicians who push policies at odds with the interests of the rank and file.

On his first day in office, Biden signed an executive order killing more than 10,000 good-paying union jobs. But that's not the first time middle-class jobs have been sacrificed to win favor with the vocal progressives who have come to dominate the Democratic Party.

Over the past 10 months, the United Food and Commercial Workers' Union has been pushing demands that don't mesh with the interests of its members for what one presumes are political reasons. UFCW International President Marc Perrone has been demanding of some of the nation's largest grocery chains the introduction of hazard pay for members working during the COVID pandemic.

Initially, the demand was for \$2 an hour. Now it's up to \$4 or even \$5 an hour in several cities on the West Coast, backed by city and county politicians whose campaigns the unions funded.

Shortages caused by the lockdowns have created unprecedented challenges for grocers and their front-line employees. The union's attacks on these companies, who have invested billions in their stores to improve safety measures, ignore the facts. Its continuing complaint that workers are still at risk overlooks how grocery chains like Kroger are now offering \$100 bonuses to employees who get the coronavirus vaccine.

No matter how much hazard pay the union can arrange, it will never be enough. The UFCW and Perrone care more about headlines and proving they can flex their muscle than they do about the impact their demands have on working American families.

In Long Beach, California — the first city to mandate additional hazard pay for grocery workers — Kroger will close two underperforming stores because the order increased labor costs by more than 20%. Hundreds of workers, most of them UFCW members, are losing their jobs because the politicians got for the union what it demanded. If these shortsighted policies persist, this could become the new normal.

A recent study from the California Grocers Association found California's hazard pay ordinances could raise grocery costs for the average family of four by \$400 a year. At the same time, somewhat ironically, Perrone and other UFCW leaders have refused to suspend weekly dues payments during the pandemic. Being able to temporarily forgo those payments would help households stretch their budgets and be a real economic stimulus that could increase purchasing power by hundreds if not thousands.

Perrone may think the more than \$350,000 he gets in compensation is more important than the \$15 an hour paid to the average member of his union working 40 hours a week. He also seems to think more of non-union chains like Trader Joe's, which he has praised for boosting so-called "hero pay" to \$4 during the pandemic to pressure Kroger, Albertsons and other chains.

He fails to mention, of course, that Trader Joe's CEO admitted the pay bump means midyear raises are canceled and it might not last if cities "continue to increase the hourly rate above \$4 or have the premium remain after the pandemic."

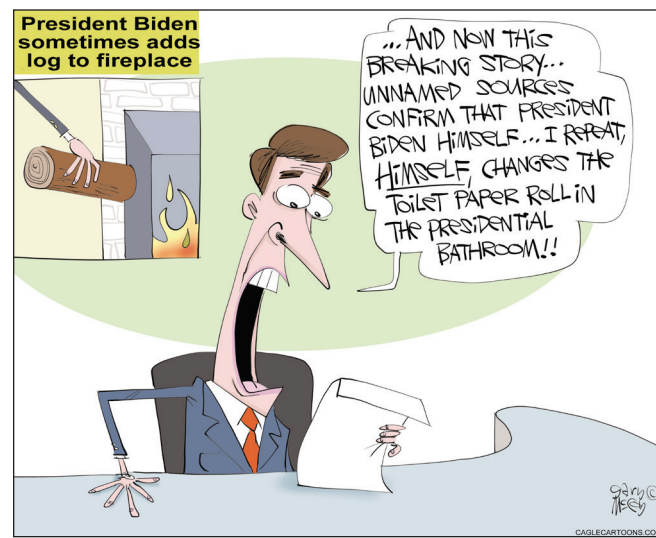
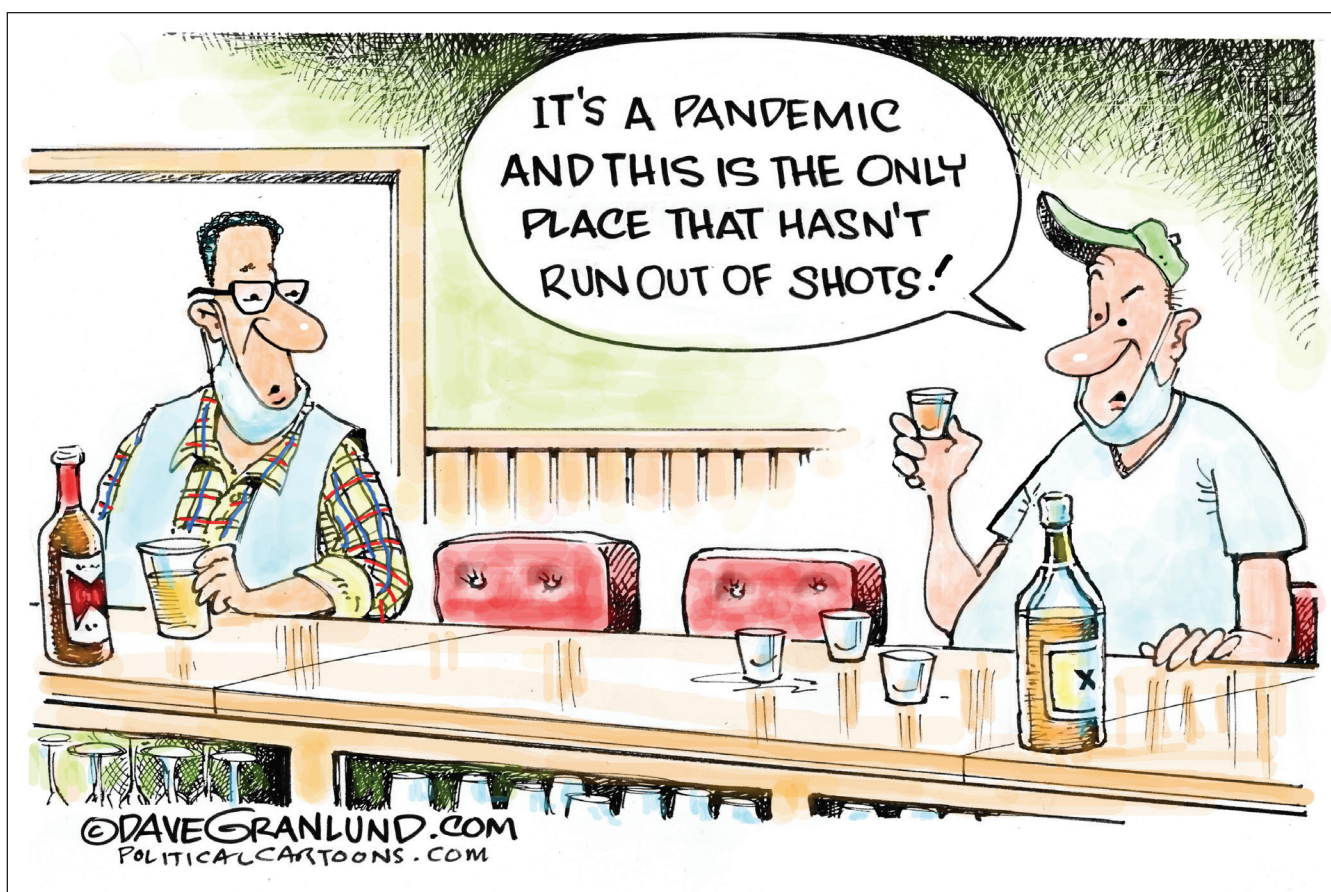
Recently, Kroger, Albertsons and Ahold made multibillion-dollar pro-worker investments to secure and stabilize the pensions of more than 50,000 unionized grocery workers. These chains put people over profits since the UFCW was significantly underfunded. Yet Perrone still spends millions in dues money for personal gain and a salary 12 times greater than what the average union member makes.

Most grocers provide employees fair wages, industry-leading benefits like pensions and health care, and COVID-19 vaccines. What does the union do?

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FRONTIERS OF FREEDOM



Our View

GOP walkout may succeed — in killing Capitol quorum rules

Do you think Gov. Kate Brown should do more to get schools to reopen? Do you think the state should do more to vaccinate seniors sooner? Do you think the state should look to speed up the reopening of businesses?

Those are reasons why Oregon Senate Republicans held a protest and walked out of the legislative session Thursday, Feb. 25. The GOP says their efforts to get Brown's attention on these issues have gone unacknowledged. So they held a walkout.

Yes, they got her attention. But Republicans didn't compel her to make any changes. And we can't imagine she will fundamentally change her approach.

Perhaps Senate Republicans did succeed in a few ways. Just getting people's attention these days takes more than making a speech. The protest got the

Oregon public's attention for at least a news cycle. And in that moment, Republicans highlighted what the difference might be if they were governing.

They also reminded their fellow legislators they still have the power to shut down the making of new laws.

Oregon is one of only a handful of states that requires by its constitution that two-thirds of lawmakers must be on the Senate floor and the House floor for work to be done. The narrow Democratic margin in the Senate means the Democratic majority is not walkout-proof. A walkout is one of the only raw powers Republicans in Oregon really have.

For how long? Will voters tire of this tactic? It seems inevitable that through a bill or an initiative a measure will get on the ballot for a constitutional amendment to

change Oregon's quorum rules to a simple majority.

That might not be something to celebrate. Yes, it would work in the favor of Democrats now. It is, though, one of the few available tools to prevent a tyranny of a simple majority.

Oregon voters are roughly evenly split between Democrats, unaffiliated voters and Republicans — in that order. There is probably far more that unites Oregonians than divides them. On some issues at least, majority opinion is slim or hard to find.

Democrats hold power now. They may not always. Democrats have used the power of the walkout before, in 1971, 1995 and 2001.

In these unsettled times, Oregonians need legislators and a governor who find ways to work together, not write new exclusionary rules.

WRITE TO US

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THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896

www.lagrandeobserver.com

Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801
Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays
(except postal holidays) by EO Media Group,
911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850
(USPS 299-260)

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La Grande, OR 97850

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