

# Summer Jobs

## No Americans wanted

It's summer – the season when high school and college kids hit the streets looking for jobs. But the hunt is getting harder than ever. The percentage of teenagers who got jobs last summer was the lowest since World War II. This year, 1.5 million teenagers were unemployed as of May – before school let out.

For decades, American college kids have flocked to cheesy boardwalk towns as one of the prime sources of summer work. But this year, when members of Congress escape D.C. for the Maryland shore, the people who sell them T-shirts, serve them cotton candy and usher their kids onto the boardwalk rides are most likely to be Russians or Ukrainians.

How did these jobs get outsourced to kids from the East? Simple. It's a giveaway from Republican leaders – the same people who can't stop complaining about "illegal immigrants" – to their donors in the retail industry.

Under the J-1 visa program, up to 150,000 foreign students work in the U.S. every summer – primarily from the former Soviet Union. There is no limit on the number of students who can be brought in, and no requirement that employers hire Americans before turning to foreigners. Though the program is promoted as "cultural exchange," there is, in fact, no culture and no exchange. No American kids are going to work in Moscow. And those who come here get no educational content whatsoever. In fact, the government pays so little attention to the jobs these kids get that the J-1 workers were found working in strip clubs last summer.

This is cheap labor, pure and simple. Employers prefer these kids to hiring Americans for obvious reasons. First, in Russia, unlike the U.S., it's legal to advertise for "cute blonde girl, 18-21." No fatties in the cultural exchange! Furthermore, employers get to pay low wages, no Social Security, no Medicare, and no health insurance. And even if J-1 workers are cheated out of their modest wages, they're unlikely to ever complain.

Here's what you need to know about being a guestworker: you don't get a visa to the U.S.; you get a visa to a single employer. If you do anything to piss off your boss, you can be fired on the spot. And if you're fired, you're deported. It costs a few thousand dollars to get here, and most people don't have that kind of money, so they borrow it from friends and family. So if you're deported before the summer is over, you've screwed your extended family.

This is what makes guestworkers beloved by bosses everywhere. Spray pesticides on them in the fields; make them sleep 10 to a room; overcharge them for crappy trailer housing – they won't make a peep. And if they do – send them home! It's not like they can write a letter to their congressman.

Last year, student guestworkers were paid as little as \$1 an hour, with some housed in apartments so crowded that they slept in shifts and ate on the floor. In Ocean City, Md., a church found itself serving meals to 1,700 foreign students who lined up nightly at its homeless shelter.

Employers prefer these cheap, docile and disposable workers to us uppity locals – and they're trying to replace more and more of us. In 2010, U.S. corporations applied to import guestworkers for almost every type of service work – including 40,000 jobs in circuses and amusement parks, 150,000 housekeepers, and almost 500,000 landscape workers. I guess these are some of the "job creators" we keep hearing about.

Here in Oregon, guestworkers have long been used for landscape, forestry, and construction work, and are now also running county fairs, as Beaverton-based Butler Amusements claims it can't find Americans willing to do this work.

Every couple of years, someone in Washington tries to crack down on the use of guestworkers. But they never get past the corporate lobbies. The biggest organization pushing for guestworkers is the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which founded the "Essential Worker Immigration Coalition." From its name, you might think EWIC is focused on registered nurses or software programmers; instead, they define "essential workers" as "less skilled and unskilled labor." EWIC's membership includes the National Restaurant Association, the Hotel & Lodging Association, Association of Amusement Parks, and the Nursery and Landscape Association. In other words, all the service industries that can't physically move to Mexico or China now want to bring Mexico and China to them, so they can take advantage of third-world wages without having to leave home.

For the millions of unemployed Americans, it may be a shock to hear that there's a critical shortage of people willing to wait tables or cut timber. But for big business, what's "essential" about foreign workers is not their skills, but their desperation. And to replace us with bargain-basement labor, they're willing to pay handsomely – to politicians, that is. For instance, the Restaurant Association – a big proponent of guest workers – has given \$4.5 million to federal politicians since 2005.

For business, guestworkers offer all the advantages of undocumented workers without the stigma of illegality. For elected officials, too, guestworkers are a win-win: politicians can guarantee the flow of cheap workers to their corporate backers, while still talking tough against the "illegals." The only ones who lose out are all the rest of us – us and the kids eating on the floor.

*Gordon Lafer is a UO political scientist and in 2009-10 served as a senior policy advisor to the U.S. House of Representatives. He is also the author of Free and Fair? How Labor Law Fails U.S. Democratic Election Standards (2005).*



## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### BEING THERE

I wish to publicly thank Sacred Heart Medical Center for their "Bridge Program."

Thank you so much for having such a wonderful program and for being there for me, without question, though from the start you knew I had no insurance to reimburse you. I was hospitalized three different times in the span of four months. I found all the hospital staff, volunteers, CNAs, clergy, counselors, nurses and doctors quite compassionate and caring.

I was suffering from depression and to receive a letter saying that my complete bill was being forgiven brought me relief beyond description. It is tough enough to pull oneself up from the depths of despair, but when you add on top of it all the worries of a massive hospital bill, along with the guilt you feel for the financial hardship you have brought upon your family, the thoughts of losing our home became very real during this medical emergency.

I know some in our community were not happy with the expense spent on our new community hospital, and I, too, still question its location in a flood plain. But I can attest to the healing powers of the river, which my wife and I could view from my hospital room. Once again thank you so much for your thoughtfulness and generosity. I promise to do what I can in my own simple small ways to give back to our wonderful Eugene/Springfield community. To those able financially to give to local charities, I would give my heartfelt recommendation to Sacred Heart's "Bridge Program."

I own my own small business and live a pretty simple life. To throw my own two cents into the pot, I would love to see some sort of (here comes that scary word) socialized health care system adopted by our country. I would also like to thank all those who had me in their thoughts and prayers as I found my way back up.

*Tim Boyden  
Eugene*

### INSURRECTION

Foreseeing a time that a rebellious political party would seek to do harm to the financial security of our nation for political gain, the framework of our government was

amended to derail such an insurrection. Amendment 14, Section 4 states, "The validity of the public debt of the United States ... shall not be questioned." The current turmoil about the unconstitutional debt ceiling would not be occurring if our leaders would just read the Constitution. Either we use our Constitution to govern, or we ignore it and lose it.

*Michael T. Hinojosa  
Drain*

### GOOD GOVERNANCE

Your recent cover story (7/14) about the majority of Lane County commissioners' hard shift to the right ought to be a wake-up call for Lane County residents.

Whether it's clean water or energy efficiency, the majority approach to public policy is to rely on voluntary compliance or do nothing at all. Either way, we have no assurance our watershed or residential energy conservation needs will be met. Good governance requires a commitment to policies that sustain the entire community, not just a few wealthy donors. Many of these decisions have been made without the necessary transparency for an engaged electorate to have informed consent as to their efficacy. I encourage *EW* to continue exploring the impact of county policies that affect us all.

*Pat Reilly  
Eugene*

### AUDITING STANDARDS

If the article by Mr. Pittman ("Auditing the Auditor," 7/14) is even half right, there appears to be "trouble in River City."

By definition an auditor is charged with the responsibility to *audit*—i.e. to evaluate—and report to elected officials with a copy available to citizens, the same as the Audit Division of the Oregon Secretary of State. The *Yellow Book* produced by the GAO establishes Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS). The Audit Division follows these procedures, and their website shows how it should be done. Is the police auditor following these standards? The reports by the police auditor *must* be available on the city website—the same as the Audit Division. If not, the city of Eugene is