

KEIZERTIMES PUBLIC SQUARE

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Treat farmworkers fairly when it comes to overtime

By RAMIRO NAVARRO

During the wildfires, while daytime skies were dark in Willamette Valley, farm workers showed up to work. In the heatwaves, farm workers endured hazardous conditions while literally dying from heat exposure. Throughout this pandemic, farm workers show up to ensure we have fresh food while fighting for access to basic protective equipment. I can empathize as someone who comes from a farm working family. But these farm workers need more than just empathy. They need our elected leaders to step up.

This session the legislature will determine if farm workers should be treated fairly, like you and me. By that I mean their ability to qualify for overtime. Some argue that "farm owners will pay too much, or "the harvest will spoil." These points sound good—but let me explain why those arguments have no merit.

As a 25-year-old farm worker, I reported to the field at 6 a.m. everyday to work a 12-hour shift. After my fifth day towing a two-story harvester with people sorting garlic seed, my replacement didn't show. My orders next were to work their shift. I should have declined but I put myself and others in danger because I needed the money, and my employer was willing to exploit that need instead of focus on the safety of the workers. After several more hours, I had to shut down the harvester before my eyelids did. This upset the sorters who had only worked a nine-hour shift. I clocked 69 hours in five days without overtime in hazardous conditions because laws did not protect me or the sorters from the abuse.

Four months later: Same 12-hour shifts, seven days a week. Only this time

guest OPINION

the harvest was Christmas trees. Gravel lots lined with lamps pointing up into semi-trucks in the same way that some UPS and FedEx lots are setup, only these packages are Noble firs instead of Amazon packages. While UPS, FedEx and Amazon are required to pay overtime which helps their schedule, farm owners are not. This crop doesn't spoil though. It actually gains value as it grows if not harvested. There's also about as much nutritional value in a Christmas tree as there is in an Amazon box but only one worker delivering their product is eligible for fair wages. So farmworkers are taken advantage of, season after season, in hazardous conditions because there's very little protecting them from the abuse that has run rampant.

I support farmworker overtime because we need to move past prejudiced practices of ancient times. Washington State has. California has. So when nurseries complain "it's hard to find workers," explain to them that's probably because they fled to our neighbors in the north and south who pay better. If the argument is "farm owners will have to automate," I say let them. That means more workers for the thousands of Oregon jobs which are severely understaffed. We talk about paying people what their worth, so why not farm workers. Farm workers are people, too.

(Ramiro Navarro lives in Keizer, where he is a business owner.)

Can Biden stand up to Putin?

By MARC A. THIESEN

Here's a question: If President Joe Biden can't stand up to Germany, how can he stand up to Russian President Vladimir Putin over Ukraine?

Most of the NATO alliance is united in taking a tough stand to support Ukraine and deter and punish Russia if it invades. The skunk at the garden party is Berlin. While other NATO allies provide Ukraine with weapons, Germany is blocking Estonia from sending military aid to Kyiv, refusing to provide permits for the transfer of German-origin weapons to the besieged democracy.

Germany is also resisting efforts to specify tough sanctions the allies would impose if Putin does in fact invade. The reason? Sanctions that actually hurt Putin would have to target Russia's two most significant exports: oil and natural gas. But Germany is the world's biggest buyer of Russian gas. For decades Berlin has been turning itself into Moscow's energy vassal—phasing out coal and nuclear power, while increasing its dependence on Russian imports. Germany now gets more than half of its gas imports from Russia (compared with about 40% on average for the rest of the European Union).

Worse still, Germany has insisted on proceeding with the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline with Russia. Nord Stream 2 represents an existential threat to Ukraine, because it will allow Putin to cut off natural gas exports to Kyiv without cutting off Western Europe. It will also double Germany's capacity for Russian gas imports—increasing its dependence on Russian energy. Biden waived U.S. sanctions imposed by the Trump administration, greenlighting the project to appease Berlin. Now Germany won't even commit to shutting down the pipeline if Russia invades, with the German defense minister declaring, "We should not drag [Nord Stream 2] into this conflict."

The other sanctions that would hurt Moscow involve blacklisting major Russian banks, and kicking Moscow out of the SWIFT network used by almost all major financial institutions to wire money—which would effectively exclude Russia from the global economy. But once again, Germany, is opposed, and as a result, *Reuters* reports that "Western governments are no longer considering cutting Russian banks off from the Swift global payments system."

If Biden wants to prevent a Russian invasion, he needs to stop letting Germany dictate the U.S. response and start projecting strength. He does not need Germany's permission to act.

First, he should immediately reimpose the sanctions he lifted on Nord Stream 2. He should tell Berlin that Russia has already demonstrated that it cannot be allowed to hold Ukraine's energy supplies hostage—and that he will not allow

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Germany to increase Europe's dependence on Russian energy.

Second, he should outline the specific, crippling sanctions the United States will impose on Russian energy exports if Putin invades, and publicly name the Russian banks the United States will sanction. He can do this without giving Berlin a veto.

Third, he should take the Polish government up on the offer they made when Donald Trump was in office to move U.S. troops from Stuttgart, Germany, to a new permanent U.S. military base in Poland. Why should Germany—which, despite being the wealthiest country in Europe, spends only 1.4% of its gross domestic product on defense—continue to be rewarded with the economic benefit of U.S. bases?

Biden is deploying 5,000 U.S. troops to Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. This sounds like strength, but in fact it is the opposite. The proposed deployment appears to be little more than a bargaining chip with Moscow. *NBC News* reports that Biden might propose scaling back existing U.S. troop deployments and military exercises in Poland and the Baltics in exchange for Russia scaling back its forces on the border with Ukraine—throwing our NATO allies under the bus to appease Putin. Putin's aggression should not be rewarded with any concessions on where NATO forces are deployed. Instead, Biden should make clear that if Putin invades, he will move all 35,000 U.S. troops out of Germany and station them in permanently Poland and the Baltics.

Putin thinks Biden is bluffing when he threatens serious consequences. He knows that in 2014, when he last invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea, the Obama-Biden administration shied away from energy and banking sanctions that would have hit Moscow in a significant way. The paltry sanctions they did impose temporarily cost Russia about 1 percent of GDP—a price Putin was willing to pay for Crimea. He's betting that the Western allies will not do much more today. He knows that Germany will seek to weaken any Western response, because he has hooked Berlin on Russian energy.

This is why Biden needs to stand up to both Berlin and Moscow. If he fails to do so, this could be the end of the Atlantic alliance. The purpose of NATO was to deter Russian aggression. If allies can't agree to take steps necessary to do that, then it's fair to ask: Why does NATO exist? And it will be Biden—and Berlin—that killed it.

(Washington Post)

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