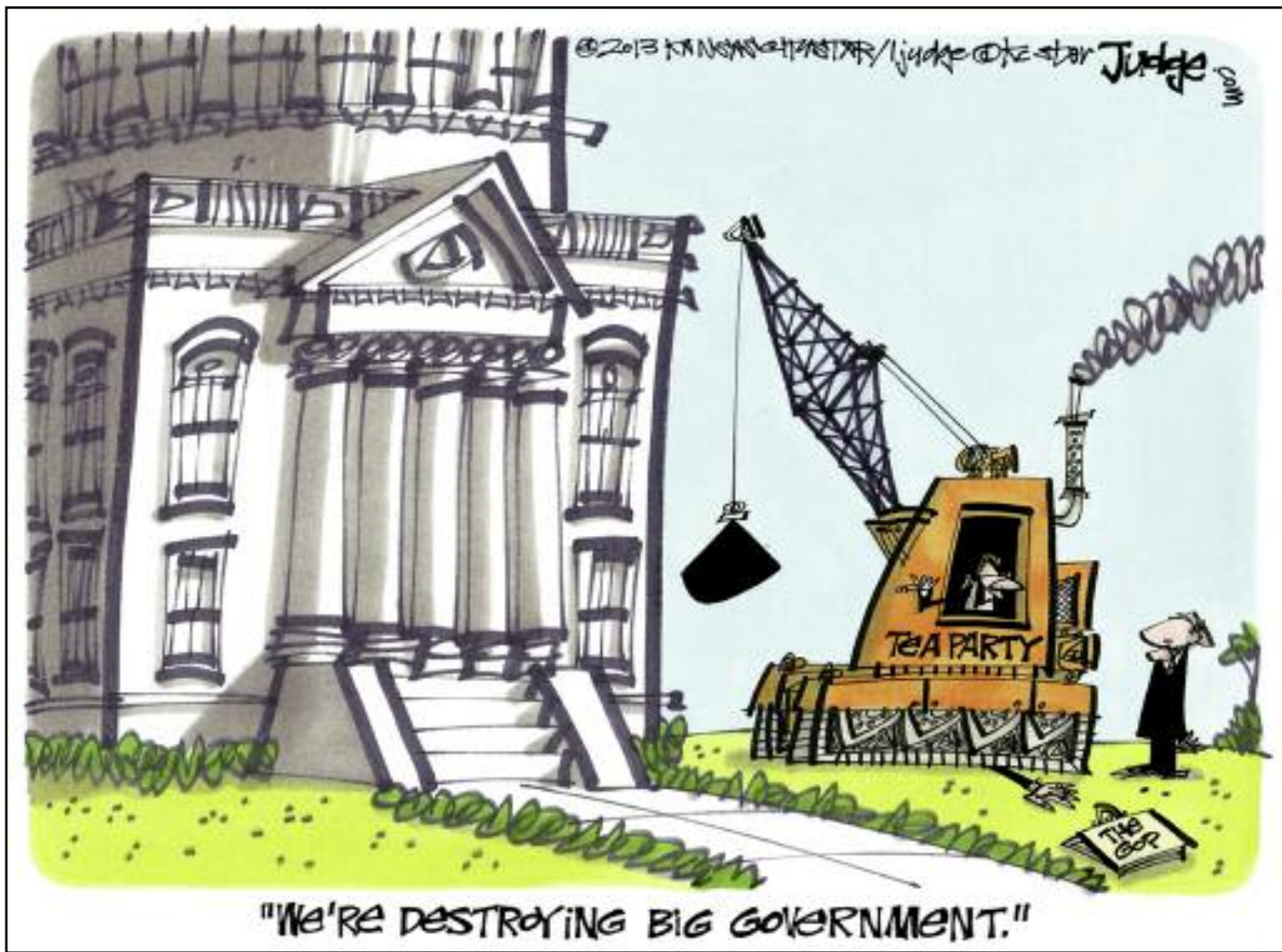


OPINION

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.
 - The First Amendment to the United States Constitution



By Richard Kirsch

COMMENTARY

How to move millions into the middle class

President Barack Obama is pledging to make the rest of his time in office about “making this country work for working Americans again.” That means one branch of government is on the case.

After rejecting White House proposals to create good jobs that would rebuild our crumbling infrastructure and invest in renewable energy, Republicans in Congress have already put hundreds of thousands of people — or more — out of work with meat-ax budget cuts that may last through the end of next year.

Fortunately, Obama doesn't have to wait for Congress to help move two million Americans into the middle class. He can issue an executive order that would improve earnings for low-wage workers whose jobs are financed by the federal government. He can do it now.

In his speech at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, Obama recognized that “the income of the top 1 percent nearly quadrupled from 1979 to 2007, while the typical family's barely budgeted.” He aims to do something about this growing inequality by implementing what he calls “middle-out economics” — a strategy that hinges on good jobs, quality education, affordable health care, a secure retirement, and strong neighborhoods.

Building the middle class starts with good jobs. Today, most new jobs are in retail, home health care, fast food, and other low-paying fields. But these jobs don't have to pay low wages. After all, factories paid low wages before workers organized unions in the 1930s and won decent wages and benefits. And unlike factory jobs, many service jobs can't be exported overseas.

In the 1930s, and again in the 1960s, the federal government helped raise wages for workers. Congress passed laws and presidents issued executive orders that required businesses with federal contracts to pay their workers their industry's prevailing wage. That meant better pay.

Those laws are now outdated. They only cover one out of five federally funded private-sector workers. Even for those workers still covered, wage rates can be little higher than the federal minimum. According to a recent study by the think tank Demos, the federal government now funds over two million jobs paying under \$12 per hour — more than Walmart and McDonald's combined — in such industries as food, apparel, trucking, and home health care.

In another report on the federal-contract workforce, the National Employment Law Project (NELP) interviewed over 500 contract workers. The group found that 74 percent are paid less than \$10 per hour, and 58 percent receive no benefits from their employer.

Who are these workers? One is Lucy Johnson of Knoxville, Tennessee. She sews military uniforms for American soldiers, and after 25 years of work, she makes just \$7.25 an hour. Another is Lucila Ramirez. Though she's worked 21 years as a janitor at the federally owned Union Station in Washington, D.C., she's paid just \$8.75 an hour.

A presidential executive order could directly help Lucy, Lucila, and the millions like them who get paid by Medicare to care for our elders, work as security guards at federally leased buildings, and labor on federally funded construction projects. The order would require that jobs financed by federal funds pay living wages (not just minimum wage or the prevailing wage in a low-wage industry) and provide paid sick days. It would also bar employers that get federal contracts from fighting unionization.

There's already a precedent: Some 120 cities around the country have created living wage standards for firms that get municipal contracts. Typically, these local laws require paying higher than the minimum wage and contributing to health benefits.

“Whatever executive authority I have to help the middle class, I'll use it,” Obama promised in Galesburg. He can start setting a good example of middle-out economics by boosting job quality for at least two million workers whose pay comes from the government he leads.

Richard Kirsch is a senior fellow at the Roosevelt Institute and the author of *Fighting for Our Health: The Epic Battle to Make Health Care a Right in the United States*. He's also a senior adviser to USAction. USAction.org Distributed via OtherWords. OtherWords.org.

Dinner honors Fairborn community volunteers

I am always amazed at all of the good people doing good things in Fairborn! It is time to recognize these people for what they contribute to our community. Thursday night was one of those nights.

Each week, local businesses and churches sponsor “Feed the Team” for Fairborn High School Varsity/JV football. These folks volunteer their time, energy and willingly pay to feed our youth. This weekly event is very important because it provides the opportunity for the Fairborn community to interact with our youth in a special way.

This week, Pastor Gene Cline and members of his congregation hosted the Skyhawks on Thursday evening. Dinner was provided (hotdogs, hamburgers, macaroni and cheese) and cookies and ice cream for dessert. As I sat and watched the volunteers prepare dinner and speak with the football players I realized that this is what “community” is all about. Of course, the seniors get to “eat first” while the freshman wonder if there will be any food left for them!

After dinner, Pastor Cline gave an inspirational talk to all in attendance. The room was silent as he spoke about his wish for the Skyhawks. He spoke about being part of a team, stepping outside your comfort zone; and most importantly that there will be times when you are asked to do something when you believe you may be better at something else; but in the interest of the team; you need to do what you are being asked to support the team. As I thought about what Pastor Cline was saying I realized that these weekly dinners are providing insights into teamwork but more importantly insights into developing honest, productive hard working student-athletes.

As adults, we go to work each day, or to volunteer, or to work at

home; we usually have to step outside our “comfort zone” at times to be successful and to grow as a person. And as a parent and worker; there are many times that one must do what we need to do for the team, or company, or family-what is in the best interests of the greater whole. What a wonderful message for Fairborn's athletes — these caring adults taking time from their busy schedules to host these dinners and share a part of themselves with our youth. I believe that at the end of football season; with a winning or losing record, one of the brightest lights these kids will remember are these Thursday night team dinners and what it feels like

to be part of a community like Fairborn.

I also want to recognize a really great mom, Stacy Johnson. Stacy is the “Team Mom” for Varsity football. She organizes the dinners each week for the Skyhawks. Stacy has her hands full at home and her husband is in Korea for a year; yet whenever I see her she is smiling and trying to do the best for our kids. She even made “Skyhawk” gift boxes for the volunteers at Trinity filled with Buckeyes and decorated in our school colors. What an amazing person she is! At the end of the evening, the senior football players each presented the gift boxes to the volunteers from the church.

Thank you to Pastor Cline and all the volunteers from Trinity United Church of Christ. You are a Skyhawk Point of Pride and a bright light in our community! Pastor Gene Cline is married to Sue Holloway, a math teacher at Fairborn High School.

Pam Gayheart works at Fairborn City Schools in Public Relations/Grants.

By Pam Gayheart

LOCAL COLUMNIST

Letter to the Editor

Old classmates still have connection

Fairborn Baker High School's class of '73 gathered together this month after 40 years. I'd expected the fun. Yet, from the moment people arrived, there was a charge of energy that was unmistakable. And it grew.

It seemed that we were drawn to each other like magnets. There was a need to connect. Oh, our school stories, the good and the bad! We shared the successes and the losses. It did not matter where life had taken us. The hugs, the laughs and the tears came easily. What struck me is how each was received with such genuine warmth and caring — after 40 years. These people had wonderful personal qualities. So, I gave a second thought to Fairborn in the 1960 and '70s. There were many shared values: personal character, family first, pro-learning, love of community. Pride.

Overriding all was the realization that our Fairborn years were much more than just a chapter in our lives. They were defining in who we have become. And that energy charge? Joy feels right. My head will be held a bit higher now, when I say that I'm from Fairborn.

— Cary (Boyd) Criss, Dublin

Editorial

Nation still has racial progress to achieve

It's been 50 years since the historic March on Washington.

The march — remembered to this day in large part because of a moving and powerful speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. — was a poignant and peaceful call for racial equality and programs to end poverty.

So today, a half-century later, the question is being asked: How much have we progressed from that era, and how much farther do we have to go?

The answer, if one is honest, is a mixed bag. Obviously, there have been tremendous gains in the realm of racial equality in this country. That's particularly true when it comes to the law. Racial segregation is no longer legal. The law is now a tool to promote equality, when in the past, it often posed as a barrier.

And it's no small matter that America now has a black president. Such an occurrence would have been unthinkable in 1963.

But race in America is hardly a problem of the past. Statistically, black Americans continue to lag in virtually all economic data compared to whites. There are also gaps when it comes to education, housing and other areas considered crucial for social and economic well being.

And then there is the matter of crime. Black-on-black violence — particularly among young

black men — is an epidemic in this country. It is fueled by the drug trade and a subculture that seemingly rejects the value of education and lawful conduct, and many young blacks find themselves living in a world where gang violence and short life spans are conditions to be expected.

What's to blame for this? You can find all sorts of answers, many of them ideologically driven from the left and right. Still, they may have their aspects of truth. In many ways, government programs have lessened the need for community involvement and accountability. Throwing money at a problem does not solve it.

On the other hand, there remains a gulf between the races in America. And so long as problems within black neighborhoods are viewed as something separate from the nation as a whole, they will persist.

Ironically, while President Obama may be well positioned to understand the problems of race in America, he has been unable to do much about it. Obama's status as the nation's first black president makes it difficult for him to tackle race matters head-on.

But they need to be tackled in some fashion — and not just by a president. All Americans have a role in issues of race. That means refusing to pretend problems don't exist or that they are someone else's responsibility.

— New Castle News, New Castle, Pa.

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- Letters should be typed, or printed legibly, signed and include current address and daytime phone number of the author. Full addresses will not be published. Form and anonymous letters will not be accepted.
- Letters to the editor must be 350 words or less. Deadline for letters is 9 a.m. The Friday before publication. Letter writers have a limit of two published letters every 30 days.
- Letters will be verified by the newspaper via telephone. The newspaper reserves the right to edit for length, style and grammar and to limit the number of

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Fairborn Daily Herald

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