

June 11, 2024

Many political commentators on the 2024 presidential election cite the mantra of Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign, "It's the economy, stupid." The economic indicator in the headlines this article will look at is workers' wages. Only time will tell if take-home pay was the sign experts needed to monitor.

The June 7th edition of the New York Times asks, "Are American Workers' Wages Really Lagging Productivity?" The article examines whether a half century ago workers' pay stagnated even as each employee produced more for their employer. From the data included in the authors search, he concludes, "What is clear is that median pay has not kept up with economywide productivity growth since the 1970s." The key word in this quote is "median." The wages of skilled workers, supervisors and the self-employed have more than kept up with productivity and reflect that capitalism rewards effort.

Reuters on June 10th announced, "Uber Loses Challenge to California Gig Work Law in US Appeals Court." At the heart of Uber's lawsuit was the claim that their drivers were self-employed contractors rather than employees. California has set a high minimum wage businesses must pay employees. The article notes, "Employees are entitled to the minimum wage, overtime pay, reimbursements for expenses and other protections that are not extended to independent contractors." The problem with this definition was featured in the June 10th National Review's article, "The California Minimum-Wage Disaster." This piece states, "If the price of something goes up, people will buy less of it. Californians are now learning the hard way that this principle applies to labor just as much as it does to any other good or service."

On June 10th the e-newsletter Common Dreams contained, "Workers Reject Trump 'Pandering' on Tipped Wages—But Have Message for Democrats Too!" The title was in response to the Republican presidential candidate's pledge to exempt tips from taxes. A workers' advocate cited in the article commented that taxed tips are a common complaint among her constituency. The advocate stated, "The Republican's comments reveal a shortcoming in the Democratic Party's economic justice record." Instead of embracing the no-taxed-tips pledge as a solution, she saw it as, "a call to Democrats who have yet to come out at any level, calling for what workers really do need this year: a living wage." The article advocated for business owners, rather than customers, being responsible for the money their workers received.

The Bible has a lot to say about wages. For example, as the Israelites were coming out of slavery and able to profit from their own efforts, God had Moses command employers, "Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a citizen or a foreigner who lives among you. Pay them their wages each day before sunset, otherwise they may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin" (Deut 24:14-15). Jesus told his disciples, "The worker deserves his wages" (Luk 10:7). The labor laws given to the church in Corinth tied the Old and New

Testaments together, “The Law of Moses states, ‘Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.’ God doesn’t just care about oxen, He cares for us. This verse was written as an analogy because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest” (1 Cor 9:9-10).

I hope that whichever candidate wins the election cares as much about take-home pay as God does.