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LETTER

A Lack of Respect for the Working Class in America Today

“Someone needs to do the nuts-and-bolts, hands-on work that keeps our country going, and those who do deserve more than hardship for their efforts,” a reader says.

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To the Editor:

I worry about the nation my children will inherit.

I worry about the erosion of confidence in our government and its institutions by the working-class community.

I worry that more and more people believe that all politicians and public officials are corrupt, partisan and out for themselves.

I worry that as this point of view becomes more accepted, the ground for autocrats and strongmen becomes more fertile, and our democracy more imperiled.

I worry that our representatives, on both sides of the aisle, are so removed from the reality of working-class life that they fail to see, and fail to understand, the true driving forces of working people’s discontent.

Some Republican leaders have responded to this discontent by making scapegoats out of immigrants and minorities, and some Democratic leaders have falsely characterized working people as ignorant bigots, and then dismissed them as a lost cause.

Members of the working-class community have lost confidence in mainstream politicians and our institutions because their needs have been ignored. They vote for fringe candidates out of desperation, because they feel they have no voice in the establishment.

For decades, as our nation increased its wealth, working people saw little improvement in their lives. They helped to make our country prosperous, but, increasingly, have been unable to pay their bills or afford health care.

For decades, corporate leaders and their shareholders built their personal wealth by cutting worker benefits, eliminating pensions, dismantling unions and demanding ever higher levels of productivity and efficiency, while eliminating any sense of job security.

For decades, our representatives in Washington allowed this degradation to continue unchecked and have often enriched themselves by turning a blind eye or by being openly complicit. Our political leaders allowed workers to be treated as just another disposable commodity.

This lack of respect for a group of people absolutely critical to the success of our nation has torn our country apart and threatens everyone's future.

We must find a more equitable balance between wages, productivity and profits. A rise in productivity should trigger a rise in salary, and when profits soar, the working people instrumental in that success should share in its bounty.

Also, our society as a whole must acknowledge the essential contributions of the working-class community, and acknowledge that working people's lives have value. Someone needs to do the nuts-and-bolts, hands-on work that keeps our country going, and those who do deserve more than hardship for their efforts.

And, finally, our political leaders must actually do their jobs and advocate for the needs of all people, and not just their corporate sponsors.

If we can start down this road of economic and social justice, then I believe:

Confidence in our government and its institutions would begin to strengthen.

The immoral scapegoating of immigrants and minorities would find little support.

The sense of hopelessness felt by many in the working class would begin to subside, as would, perhaps, the rates of drug abuse and suicide.

And political opportunists and autocrats, who are a greater danger to our nation than any external enemy, would have no foothold.

Steps must be taken to include everyone in our nation's prosperity. Only then will we bridge the gulf that divides us.

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