

Riding the Gravy Train Express

Perhaps it was from watching those old Frank Capra movies where the wealthy and empowered are honored for their just treatment of their fellow man. Maybe it was his obliviousness of the Thanksgiving and Christmas spirit that struck me as I read Red Jahncke's criticism of Connecticut for providing state workers a decent wage, excellent health care and a pension one can retire on with dignity after many years of serving the public. How would these workers, most of whom are middle class, face vulnerable old age with substandard health insurance, "meaningful pension benefit reductions" and the gutted Social Security/Medicare/Medicaid systems Mr. Jahncke has falsely claimed are unsustainable? How can they expect their kids to believe in the American ideal of upward mobility after telling them that they can't attend the colleges the children of elite investors enjoy, or that they'll need to move because the rent's too high and tighten their belts because food is unaffordable despite their hard work? Our state workers pay a higher percentage of their wages in taxes than our Gold Coast brethren, but the American middle class has been trickle-down waning steadily for decades.

Mr. Jahncke has misidentified the passengers aboard the "gravy train" he claims is ruining our economy. Middle-class state workers *work* for a living. They *earn* the benefits all toiling people deserve. These folk don't have extra gravy to invest- they are doing their best just to pay their bills. We are obliged to them, and Scripture reminds us that "The worker is worthy of his wages."

Mr. Jahncke writes that "There may be no such thing as a free lunch." But he has the wrong diners at that lunch counter. The middle class *pays* for its own lunch and for the lunches of those who can afford to hire experts to dodge taxes and accumulate obscene, anhidrotic wealth. Rather than rousing struggling private workers against state workers- pitting working folk against each other by suggesting that if one group is miserable, the other must be made miserable as well- he should be advocating for universal healthcare and childcare, decent, realistic wages and defined retirement benefits for every American. He should favor raising standards to the greatest common denominator instead of lowering them to the least. That our state leads the nation in compensating its workers is a model for us to be proud of and for others to emulate, not an error requiring correction. His contention that good, hard-working people are riding a gravy train while munching free lunch is demeaning, disrespectful and ludicrous. What will happen to the economy when they no longer have money to spend?

Mr. Jahncke's "reforms," based on his Group's commissioned "experts," are self-serving rationalizations that will add to the continued evisceration of the middle class. When it finally fades away, only the powerful, greedy rich and the exhausted, hammered poor will be left. Freeze the wages; freeze the worker. His is not a message of goodwill suitable for a Christmas card.

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