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The Blue-Collar Recovery

The economic recovery is really beginning to reach into Trump country. The president is famous for his extravagant promises, involving,

invariably, the biggest and the best. The landscape is littered with examples, although he never promised to create blue-collar jobs at the fastest clip since 1984, something he achieved in the first half of 2018.

A labor market that has been rocky since the financial crisis, and hasn't truly delivered for many workers for decades, is robust enough to reach all corners of the economy, including Trump areas that have recently been doing better than other parts of the country.

As the Brookings Institution observes, "goods-producing industries have been surging while services industries have seen their seasonally adjusted employment growth slow since 2016." This is good news for smaller, more rural areas, which are now actually outpacing the growth rate in large urban areas. According to Jed Kolko of Indeed Hiring Lab, "job growth accelerated between 2016 and '17 in counties that Trump won by at least 20 points." Several things are going on. As the labor market has tightened -- in June, there were 6.7 million job openings and 6.6 million unemployed Americans -- it has benefited workers down the income scale. The administration, for its part, has leaned into a pro-growth tax and deregulatory program meant to spur more investment and remove burdens on business. The goal has been to defeat fatalist predictions of a "secular stagnation" that supposedly meant that we could never realistically expect anything more than middling economic growth. At the moment, the warnings are less of stagnation than of an alleged labor shortage that, according to CNBC, is nearing "epidemic proportions." This is exactly what we need. As Josh Barro of Business Insider points out, a tight labor market puts welcome upward pressure on wages and creates an incentive for workers to get more training and employers to provide it.

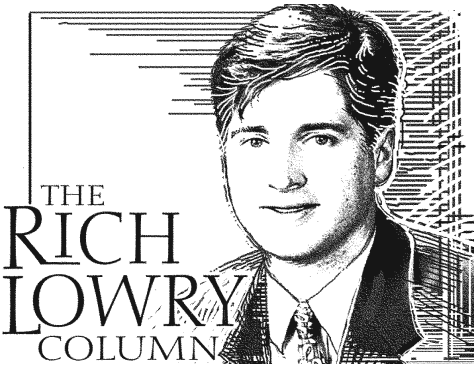
This dynamic still needs time to take hold. Wage growth, at least by traditional measures, has been surprisingly sluggish given the low unemployment rate (the White House argues that wages are being mismeasured and underestimated). But in August, encouragingly, average hourly wages increased 2.9 percent from a year ago, the biggest increase since June 2009.

As for training, a report from the National Association of Manufacturers says that two-thirds of manufacturers plan to increase worker training in the next year. This is so important because it's only possible to achieve sustainable wage gains by increasing the productivity of workers. And so far, despite the boom, productivity increases have still been lagging.

The encouraging news for blue-collar workers is welcome. But we should set our sights higher. Regaining what was lost in the aftermath of the financial crisis isn't enough. The national priority should be, as Oren Cass of the Manhattan Institute argues in his forthcoming book "The Once and Future Worker," returning to a lost golden age of work, when labor force participation rates and wage growth were both reliably high.

The implicit Trump pledge in the 2016 campaign was of jobs good and stable enough to make a decent living and raise a family. That should never be overpromising in America.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.
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American Slapstick

This is one of those "good news, bad news" situations. First, the good news: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has communicated his continuing trust in

President Donald Trump to make good on their deal, whatever it is. POTUS reciprocated by going to Twitter to thank Kim for his "unwavering faith." Now the bad news: Faith in Trump is wavering big-time in his own administration. If we can't trust Bob Woodward, who wrote in his new book that Trump's top aides go to huge lengths to block his craziest decisions, then perhaps we can believe Mr. or Ms. Anonymous, described by The New York Times only as "a senior official in the Trump administration."

With his or her identity shielded, this secret person -- presumably a higher-up somewhere in Trump-land -- has described in a Times op-ed a scary state of chaos, constantly created by the man who is the chief executive, that his top aides try to alleviate by all manner of chicanery, or as the anonymous one put it, "thwarting Mr. Trump's more misguided impulses until he is out of office."

That cloak and dagger opus came right on the heels of excerpts from Bob Woodward's book released by The Washington Post, where he works, that describes the freak show that is the Trump White House. It's called "Fear," and the details certainly are fearsome.

Needless to say, Trump, already crazed by the Woodward revelations and all the other stuff that subjects him daily to ridicule, went absolutely ballistic with the op-ed by someone who works for him. "TREASON," he tweeted, and he was reported to be screaming at everybody in sight.

Certainly, The New York Times had drawn blood. But the decision to publish an unsigned opinion was drawing condemnation not just from the president, but from many in journalism, the ones he dismisses as "enemies of the people." In this case, they joined a large number of politicians wondering whether the Times had made a mistake in allowing the author of such an incendiary column to be concealed. In case you're wondering, I share those doubts.

True, reporters frequently agree to go on "deep background" to gather information for their stories. Bob Woodward's book is full of "deep background" material. But this is for news reports. In this case, the book is an extended report, based on facts. In the Times, this was a piece reflecting a point of view in a section of the paper that is supposed to be devoted to signed opinion. Although it is not unheard of to shroud a writer's identity when his or her life would be in danger for sharing a vital perspective, it is exceedingly rare for obvious reasons.

Plus, it's awkward as all get-out. Every reporter, including those at the Times, immediately scrambled to out the nameless "senior official." Among the clues, the use of the word "lodestar," meaning a guiding light. Who commonly uses that word? Vice President Mike Pence, for one. Pence immediately denied he was the author. In fact, nearly every major domo in the administration did. Meanwhile, Kim in Pyongyang has some ideas on how to end all the Washington chaos. President Trump gives some indication he'd love to hear them. Bob Franken is an Emmy Award-winning reporter who covered Washington for more than 20 years with CNN.

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