

DET NEWS: King: Unions, middle class under attack by GOP

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BOB KING

We are in danger of losing the United States we grew up with.

For those of us growing up in the 1950s, '60s and '70s, there were two things we knew made the United States special.

One was freedom — to speak freely, practice our religion, live where we chose, join a union and participate in the political process.

The other was our middle-class values. The average person could expect to choose a career that provided dignity and security.

We became plumbers, mechanics, nurses, teachers, firefighters, assembly line workers, electricians, secretaries, small business owners and librarians. We knew we would be able to support our families in decent houses, eat out and see a movie on occasion, take modest vacations, obtain health care and retire with dignity.

Public policy supported the creation of a large middle class.

Not trying to get rich

This vision of a middle-class nation depended on a social compact and a civil society that at its core had policies enabling families to live with dignity and security. No one chose a middle-class job to get rich, and we were content to live in modest homes in safe communities. Family, community, recreation, church and supporting your family by working a 40-hour week embodied America's values.

The United States, where the vast majority of people have a middle-class standard of living, is under attack. The United States, with its values of shared sacrifice and contribution to the public good, is in question. The United States, where workers are free to join unions, is at risk.

The right wing has an alternative set of values rejecting the notion of a social compact for a middle-class society. There is a competing vision championed by right-wing governors who believe the core value of the United States is to enable individuals and corporations to maximize wealth. They want government to adopt policies that unleash capital to its highest potential earnings. They believe that individual wealth makes America great.

These policies have succeeded in altering our nation's wealth distribution to the point where income inequality is the same as it was in 1928. A new study by the Economic

Policy Institute finds that 5 percent of the population holds 63.5 percent of the country's wealth.

Action needed now

We must oppose the fiscal, tax, regulatory and union-busting agenda whose goal is supporting the accumulation of wealth.

They favor elimination of regulations that protect the public because these regulations reduce the ability of individuals and corporations to maximize their wealth. They favor tax cuts for the wealthy at the same time that they are cutting public services and programs for the middle class. They demean and ridicule public workers — especially teachers — as they try to take away their pensions and health care. They are determined to bust unions in the private and public sector, because unions put a check on how much wealth individuals and corporations can achieve. They want trade policies that encourage wealthy individuals and corporations to profit anywhere regardless of the affect on communities.

Unionized workers and community activists in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Wisconsin are leading the fight to restore a middle-class society. Without unions and the right to bargain, the middle class will lose its voice and the great national dream will be gone for our children and their children.