

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

## The Price of Work



- Post Reprint: “We’re the workers tasked with saving retail — for \$9.50 an hour”
- For Further Consideration: Self-Employed, Full-time Employee, Gig Worker
- Post Reprint: “Most vulnerable workers still in limbo”
- Post Reprint: “The overlooked hero behind Sear’s success”
- Post Reprint: “Haitian migrants revive America’s turkey town”
- Post Reprint: “Ethiopian immigrants turn job niche into labor activism”

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Students may seek employment to buy clothes or entertainment, to supplement family income or to save for college. Older workers expect to earn at least a living wage, the minimum income necessary for them to provide for housing, food, clothing and other essentials.

## KEEPING ONE'S JOB

In January 2019 a bill was introduced to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour gradually over five years. It has been 12 years since Congress passed minimum wage legislation of \$7.25 per hour. And on February 5, 2019, New Jersey became the fourth state to increase the minimum wage to \$15 per hour. It joins California, Massachusetts, New York and D.C.

Articles, discussion questions and suggested activities provide stimulus to discuss current work situations. What is the balance between wages and keeping a business profitable? Does the federal government have a responsibility to its work force, including disabled workers, on a daily basis as well as during a shutdown?

We also meet Haitian workers who have revived America's turkey town and Ethiopian workers at Reagan National and Dulles international airports. They bring to the forefront such questions as: What happens to them and their families back home when federal programs are threatened to end? What are fair wages and benefits, especially if one has worked more than ten years in one job?

And we meet Julius Rosenwald who used the fortune he made at Sears, Roebuck and Co. to help others through funds, endowments and philanthropic gifts that required matching funds. Through the influence of Booker T. Washington he funded more than 5,000 schools in 15 southern states for African American children.

Whether in traditional work, self-employment or the gig economy there are challenges to keeping one's job.

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**OUTLOOK • Perspective**

# We are the workers tasked with saving retail — for \$9.50 an hour

BY BONNIE MILLER RUBIN

• Originally Published December 17, 2018

“Hi, what brings you in today?” I chirp for maybe the 40th time that day. Each customer who walks into the store is subjected to the same insipid script, which might vary slightly depending on the weather (“Is it still raining out there?”). Once I determine her needs (a company Christmas party), I steer her to the perfect black sequined top, turn her over to another associate and hustle back to the front of the store to repeat the process. I’m on greeting duty today, which means making sure no patron goes unacknowledged — and giving up most of my commissions for the day. It’s demoralizing, but that’s retail.

Typically, consumers don’t give a lot of thought to the ubiquitous sales associate, even though retail is the nation’s No. 1 occupation. And neither did I — until I signed up for what I called “my little retirement job” following a long career as a reporter at the Chicago Tribune. I took a gig at White House Black Market at Oakbrook Center, an upscale women’s clothing store in an equally high-end mall in Chicago’s western suburbs. Rarely have I seen



MARK MAKELA/REUTERS

**The King of Prussia Mall in Pennsylvania, December 8, 2018.**

so many work so hard for so little.

The fact that retail is low-paying will hardly be a news flash to anyone. But it was an eye-opener to learn first-hand just how abysmal the compensation can be. At \$9.50 an hour, I could make twice as much babysitting, with better snacks, Netflix and no wardrobe requirements. And while the compensation in retail is increasingly low, the stakes have never been higher.

At a time when there is much hand-wringing over the decline of brick-and-mortar stores, companies are banking on the customer experience to set them apart from e-commerce.

In this new retail world, it’s up to us “girls” — and we are mostly girls — to save this giant industry, which employs 1 out of every 10 Americans, by delivering more pleasant, luxurious service, on unlivable wages.

Merchants can’t risk messy shelves, missing sizes or long lines at the check-out, especially for what is expected to be the strongest holiday season in years. With the wave of closings this year, from Sears to Lord & Taylor, we had to step up our customer service. Do you need another size? We’ll bring it to you. Want it in petite? We’ll hunt it down at another store, and it will be

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shipped to you, free of charge. You need a “smoking hot” dress for your ex’s wedding? Challenge accepted.

Such attentiveness means sales staff regularly ask clients to step out of the dressing room, so we can check the fit of a garment. But it’s also a key strategy to increasing units per transaction (UPT), which the company views as an incredibly crucial metric. That means that while you’re slipping into those jeans, I’m already scouring the racks for a top, a jacket and a belt. If you’re trying on a glitzy cocktail dress, I’ll appear with a pair of plum velvet pumps, coaxing you out of your Nikes. Ostensibly, it’s to give you a better idea of the total look, but it’s also a way to add \$150 to the sale.

A UPT of three is considered good; a four is outstanding. The time I hit a nine was as exhilarating as any page-one story during my newspaper days. (I even saved the cash register receipt.)

The attention doesn’t end when the client leaves the store. To build brand loyalty, the company encourages associates to follow up with big spenders by writing thank-you notes, even providing stationery and a manager-approved script.

All this effort pays off, at least for the company. One co-worker has a customer so faithful that she stops

in every Saturday, without fail. She might buy one item or five items, but she always buys something. While that devotion is unusual, I see the genuine affection between longtime clients and associates daily. Maybe that’s why our store, even with so much competition (Banana Republic, Zara, Ann Taylor) just around the corner, is always among the top 10 grossing White House Black Market stores in the country — a point of pride for our staff of 30.

I’m lucky to be in a financial position where I can afford to work 10 hours a week for \$9.50 an hour. Commission is on a sliding scale; selling \$201 of merchandise will get you \$1 in commission, while a \$500 sale nets you \$5. Even in my best weeks, I rarely clear \$100 after taxes (and that’s before I give most of it back to the company with my own purchases, even with my employee discount). But unlike many of my colleagues, I don’t depend on this job to survive. Those who do are always a broken tooth or a flat tire away from financial disaster.

There are other indignities, too. Working a five-hour shift earns a 10-minute break — not enough time to visit Starbucks, a mere 80 steps from our front door. Upon leaving at the end of the day, all employees must open their bags for inspection,

which is typical for the industry, according to experts, but not for me. Never before have I held a job where I needed to ask permission to get a cup of coffee or submit to a search. The scrutiny was demeaning.

While it’s easy to dismiss the “girls” as low-wage, unskilled labor, they are among the hardest-working folks I’ve ever encountered. This job requires an impressive array of skills: personal, physical and diplomatic. We steam racks of clothes, wrestle sweaters off mannequins, vacuum dressing rooms and haul out the trash; we make sale after sale with smiles on our faces and heels on our feet; we handle customers trying to return obviously worn garments and others who need a shoulder to cry on.

So why not take those same talents to a more lucrative field? Because my co-workers love clothing — the thrill of unpacking the latest shipment, of finding beautiful things in an often ugly world. For now, they’re willing to be paid in cachet rather than cash.

As a seasonal hire, I’ll be gone in January, leaving it to others to keep malls afloat. My bank account isn’t much different than when I started, but you should see my closet.

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*Bonnie Miller Rubin is a Chicago-based freelance writer.*

# Self-Employed, Full-time Employee, Gig Worker

## Wages, Commissions and Benefits

1. Select a job or career option to learn more about it from the numbers.
  - Percent of workforce involved in these jobs
  - Average hourly wages or yearly salary; highest and lowest paid within the category
  - Base salary only or salary plus tips, commissions, bonuses and other incentives
  - Health care insurance, maternity leave, vacation hours and other benefits
2. Read **“5 Myths About Fast-Food Work”** and **“We are the workers tasked with saving retail — for \$9.50 an hour.”** Compose a paragraph or short description of each type of employment. You might include working conditions and expectations, importance of customer service and interaction with customers, benefits and possibility for advancement.
3. Select two types of employment from the following list. Compare and contrast them in five areas, such as benefits and drawbacks of the job; wages and other income; education, training, licensing requirements, and opportunity for raises or advancement in the business.
  - Traditional, full-time employee
  - Self-employed, owner of company
  - Franchise owner
  - Fast-food employee
  - Sales associate
  - Part-time employee with one company
  - Worker in the gig economy
  - Child-care provider in-home
  - Babysitter
  - Landscape company owner
  - Mow lawns, rake leaves, shovel snow for neighbors
4. Read **“Most vulnerable workers still in limbo.”** Who are the people who work for organizations such as AbilityOne, SourceAmerica, Work Inc. and Chimes? What is the range of their work responsibilities?
5. Being a contract worker does not always provide steady income. One such situation occurs when the federal government has a partial shutdown. Explain its impact through examples provided in **“Most vulnerable workers in limbo.”**
6. Read **“Ethiopian immigrants job niche.”** Explain the following terms using information and examples from the article by Pamela Constable.
  - a. AFL-CIO affiliate
  - b. Ethnic group
  - c. Immigrant grapevine
  - d. Low-wage job
  - e. Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority
  - f. Niche employment
  - g. Retail services

7.
  - a. Name four concerns of the Ethiopian employees who work at terminal outlets.
  - b. What do they see as an answer to the unfair treatment?
  - c. Give one example of successful use of this approach that encourages them.
  - d. What diverse groups are supporting their cause?
  
8. Read **“Haitian immigrants revived American’s turkey town. This Thanksgiving together might be their last.”** Let’s begin with the organization or structure that reporter Damian Paletta used.
  - a. The anecdotal lede begins with a description. Where are readers placed?
  - b. Jean Felix Petit-Frere is introduced. By the fourth paragraph what do we know about him?
  - c. The fifth and sixth paragraphs are the nut graph, the statement of why we are meeting Jean Felix Petit-Frere and what he illustrates. What government policy change does the Trump administration want?
  - d. Give three examples from the feature that reveal Petit-Frere’s character, skills and attitudes. This may include actions and quotations.
  - e. The lede and ending of the feature serve as bookends. How does this unite the story?
  
9. Readers are also introduced to Elisena Joseph and her daughter Marie Rosie. They provide a larger picture of Haitians’ American experience. Summarize their story, including why they are in America and their work in Mount Olive, North Carolina.
  
10. Indicate the range of attitudes towards the Haitian workers that have been held in Mount Olive. What aspects of community life have been affected?
  
11. What might the impact on Butterball turkey-processing facility be if its immigrant workers are forced to leave?
  
12. What arguments were given by federal agencies and others in response to the White House position that “the program was meant to deal with the earthquakes. It was not meant, they say, to remain ongoing while Haiti deals with its long-standing structural problems, which might never be resolved.”
  
13. What has been the result of the lawsuit filed by a group of immigrants?
  
- 14-15. Select one of the topics addressed in these articles (for example: payment of a living wage or minimum wage of under \$10/hour; federal work policies for internationals; niche jobs; the use of robots). Take a stand. Explain your position with references to at least three articles in this guide and your wider reading.

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# Most vulnerable workers still in limbo

*Disabled contractors are unlikely to get back pay or even a job guarantee*

BY AARON GREGG

• Originally Published January 25, 2019

As a longtime janitor at the Commerce Department in Washington, Tyrone Johns had weathered government shutdowns before. But he says the most recent one, which was set to end Friday, was like no other.

His work week was reduced from five days to just two. And some of his colleagues at Chimes, a nonprofit that places disabled workers in jobs at federal buildings, said they missed rent payments and skipped medical procedures because of lost income.

For weeks, Johns was caught in a protracted standoff between President Trump and congressional Democrats over whether the next federal budget should include billions of dollars for Trump's proposed border wall. On Friday, Trump was set to sign a short-term budget deal that would reopen the government until Feb. 15, without the border wall funding he had demanded.

And as workers like Johns hope to return to their jobs, they are coming to terms with the reality that once-stable federal contract jobs can come and go at the whim of political forces beyond their control.



RICKY CARIOT/THE WASHINGTON POST

**Tyrone Johns, 61, is a custodian paid through a federal contract that employs thousands of people with disabilities. During the shutdown, he is working two days a week.**

“I don’t know why they keep doing this,” Johns said. “They just keep arguing with each other. And that’s not right, because a lot of people are out of work.”

Unlike federal workers, contractors are unlikely to receive back pay to make up for lost income. There is no guarantee that they will be able to return to work at all, with managers making such determinations on a case-by-case basis.

Johns is among thousands of people who benefit from a federal contracting set-aside program that employs disabled workers. Many were sent home without pay because

of the partial government shutdown, nonprofit managers who employed them say, raising concerns about how the shutdown has hurt those least prepared to weather it.

The people affected include those with “significant disabilities,” including learning disorders, who may have trouble coping with the anxiety of losing a job. With many of them already living paycheck to paycheck, some have fallen behind on bills. Others say they may have to stop paying for medications they need.

The nonprofit government contractors that employ them operate in

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almost every state, highlighting how the shutdown has altered lives across the country.

Workers, managers and advocates worry that the extended shutdown threatened a federal program called AbilityOne, which designates certain federal contracts for nonprofits employing people who are blind or have other disabilities.

John Kelly, vice president of government relations and public policy at SourceAmerica, an organization that works with more than 400 such nonprofits, said he is aware of 143 nonprofits across 43 states that were affected.

“We have more than 2,000 people with disabilities that were working on federal contracts that aren’t today,” Kelly said last week, when the shutdown stretched into its fifth week. “These are people who may have searched for this job for years, it

really works for them and is a really key part of their life. And now they don’t know if they’re going to get that job back or not.”

The nonprofits affected include Chimes District of Columbia, an AbilityOne contractor that employs about 1,300 people, roughly 900 of whom report having a disability. Chimes executives reported sending 100 workers home without pay because of the shutdown. Work Inc., a contractor based in Dorchester, Mass., reported sending 29 people home without pay.

Some, like Johns, saw their hours reduced or shouldered inordinate workloads as agencies tried to function with fewer employees.

Not all of those employed through the AbilityOne program are disabled. Under federal law, a nonprofit must devote 75 percent of its labor hours for a particular contract to “blind or

other severely disabled individuals” to qualify for the federal program.

Those employed on AbilityOne contracts include veterans injured in combat; aging workers with diseases including Parkinson’s; those with developmental disabilities; the blind; and people who aren’t disabled. Their responsibilities include shoveling snow in front of government buildings and inspecting military vehicles. Some are skilled tradespeople who can find other employment, but many others depend on AbilityOne contract jobs for their livelihoods.

The biggest AbilityOne customer, the Defense Department, did not lose funding during the shutdown. But a significant number of these employees work at civilian federal agencies, including the Interior Department, Commerce Department and the Environmental Protection Agency, where significant functions are deemed “nonessential” when the government shuts down.

Officials from the Trump administration and affected agencies said they were doing everything they could within the law to protect the jobs of contract workers.

“At the direction of the president, the administration is doing everything to make the lapse as painless as possible, consistent with law, and we urge Congress to do their jobs and quickly pass an appropriations bill that both opens the government and secures our borders,” said a senior administration official who spoke on the condition of anonymity last week to discuss the administration’s internal deliberations.



ISTOCK

**Older people and those with disabilities need more help finding transit services and other options for getting around, according to a new survey.**

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Brian Hoey, a spokesman for the U.S. AbilityOne Commission, an independent federal agency that administers the program, said it was “closely monitoring” the shutdown’s impact. An Interior Department spokeswoman, Faith Vander Voort, said agencies are “taking all appropriate measures” to assist contract employees during the shutdown. Other agencies referred questions to the Office of Management and Budget.

“In complete compliance with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations, [Interior Department] Acting Secretary [David] Bernhardt is taking all appropriate measures to allow employees to work and earn a paycheck on time,” Vander Voort said in an email. “That applies not only to our full-time and part-time employees, but also to those that support us through contracts. We sympathize with folks who are experiencing difficult circumstances because Congress is failing to pass a budget that secures our borders.”

For the nonprofits that depend on AbilityOne contracts, the shutdown stretched finances thin. New contract awards all but ground to a halt at civilian agencies, making it hard to find new funding.

Some managers kept their employees on the payroll through the shutdown by dipping into overhead, but it is unclear how long they would

have been able to do so.

Jim Cassetta, president and chief executive of Work Inc., says he was forced to send 29 people home without pay who had been working at an EPA building and the federally funded John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, both in Boston. Many of them have been out of work since Dec. 22, while others are using up vacation and sick days.

Cassetta says the shutdown was a “double whammy” for disabled workers because it is hard for them to quickly find part-time work. Soon after news of the shutdown broke, he started rushing the workers to local unemployment offices to begin the process of getting them unemployment benefits.

“Once they’re trained to do the job, they do phenomenal work,” Cassetta said of his disabled employees. “But they need to be supported; they need to deal with the anxiety of losing one job and being trained for another.”

One of those sent home from Work Inc. was Zach Weiner, who described himself as disabled. He was waiting for his unemployment benefits to kick in for his job in the mailroom of an EPA building.

Another was Yolanda Pagan, a janitor at the JFK Library for two years under contract with Work Inc. She hadn’t worked since before Christmas and said she wasn’t able to pay all of her bills for January.

She said she has a learning disability that could make it hard to find another manager who would work with her.

“It’s not easy for me to just go anywhere and get a new job,” she said.

Another was Ray Garcia, an electrician who helps maintain the JFK Library under a contract with Work Inc. and who said he qualifies as a disabled person. Garcia says Work Inc. was able to pay him during the shutdown by letting him use vacation days.

“What I’m doing is I’m using up my vacation time, and then I’ll use the sick time,” Garcia said. “Once I run out of sick time, I’ve got nothing. I have enough to live for a couple of weeks and stuff ... but soon I’ll run out.”

Jacqueline Dailey has worked as a clerk at the Interior Department in Washington for the past two years under a contract with Chimes. Dailey said she had been unable to work since Dec. 24 and had to delay a medical procedure because her health insurance lapsed.

“I was just in a nice routine, and now that’s all out of whack,” Dailey said. “It’s like you have a family member you have lost contact with. It was so abrupt, and we knew there was a possibility the government would shut down, but this was longer than anyone imagined.”

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## OPINIONS

# The overlooked hero behind Sears

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 BY STEPHANIE DEUTSCH
 

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• Originally Published January 21, 2019

Sears chairman Eddie Lampert's ESL hedge fund staved off, at least temporarily, the company's liquidation with a \$5.2 billion bid at a bankruptcy auction last week in New York. Creditors of the former department store colossus are challenging the sale in court. The fate of the company's 425 stores, and with it the jobs of 45,000 employees, is likely to be determined in early February.

Sears's bankruptcy declaration in October prompted a wave of media coverage focusing on Sears's mid-20th-century glory days and its roots in a mail-order watch business operated by Richard W. Sears with the help of watch repairer Alvah C. Roebuck. Often overlooked in those nostalgic chronicles was the man who bore much of the responsibility for building the company into a paragon of U.S. retailing. With Sears's future hanging in the balance, this seems like a good moment to give Julius Rosenwald his due, not least because of how he put his Sears fortune to philanthropic use: partnering with African American

communities across the segregated South to build schools.

Rosenwald was born in Springfield, Ill., in 1862 to German-Jewish immigrant parents.

He grew up working in the family's clothing store, never finished high school and as a young man started a moderately successful business in Chicago manufacturing clothes. Sears, Roebuck and Co. owed him money for men's suits in 1895, the year that Roebuck asked Sears to buy him out. Eventually, the opportunity to take an ownership stake in the company came Rosenwald's way.

In Richard Sears's heyday, it was said that he could "sell a breath of fresh air," but he was more interested in promotional gimmicks than in ensuring customers' orders were reliably and promptly filled. Rosenwald had worked behind store counters, where the offerings were limited, and he understood the hunger felt in small towns and in the countryside for the huge array of new products appearing with America's late-19th-century manufacturing revolution. He emphasized efficiency, innovation and customer service, knowing that catalogue shopping was effective only if buyers received, in a reasonable amount of time, the clothing, seeds, tools, baby carriages and sewing machines they had ordered.

Working with a creative staff, Rosenwald initiated an ingenious



ALEJANDRO CEGARRA/BLOOMBERG

Signage is displayed at the entrance to a Sears department store.

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NEW HOPE SCHOOL.ORG

**Julius Rosenwald began a clothing manufacturing business without a high school diploma. Later in life, through the influences of Booker T. Washington, he began the Rosewald program to build schools in the rural South. New Hope School, above, in South Carolina is one of the schools he funded for African American students.**

system to open letters mechanically and to fill orders through a network of chutes and conveyor belts. When the growing company needed larger quarters, Rosenwald took the lead in finding land on Chicago's West Side and commissioning an enormous facility that included a printing press for the catalogues that sat beside a railroad yard for speedier shipping. To finance the project, he turned to a friend from his days as an apprentice to his uncles in New York, Henry Goldman (then part of the young investment company Goldman Sachs), who suggested taking the company public. The initial public offering in 1906, the first for a U.S. retailer, made millionaires of both Sears and Rosenwald. In 1908, Richard Sears retired; Rosenwald wasn't done.

In his youth, Rosenwald had told a friend that his goal in life was to have an annual income of \$15,000 — \$5,000 to live on, \$5,000



LOC.GOV

**Julius Rosenwald, co-owner of Sears, Roebuck and Co., used his fortune to benefit others.**

to save and \$5,000 to give away. Now he had millions. Initially, he donated money to help Jewish organizations in Chicago and to

aid victims of Russian pogroms. But in 1910, alarmed by a surge of racial violence in the United States, he began directing his philanthropy toward African Americans.

Around that time, he was invited by the famed African American educator and author Booker T. Washington to visit the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute that Washington had founded in Alabama. Rosenwald toured the school, joined the board and followed Washington's suggestion that he donate money to assist six nearby rural African American communities in building schoolhouses.

From that beginning grew a program that, over the two decades before Rosenwald's death in 1932, built more than 5,000 schoolhouses and related structures in 15 states across the South. A 2009 study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago estimated that a one-third increase in completed schooling by

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African American students in the region was attributable to Rosenwald schools. The study also noted that “the Rosenwald program caused approximately 90,000 additional students to attend schools during the early 1930s.”

The schools played such a vital role in the education of African American children before the end of legalized segregation that the collection of the National Museum

of African American History and Culture in Washington includes student desks and a potbellied stove from the Rosenwald-funded one-room Hope School in Pomaria, S.C. The civil rights lawyer Charles Morgan Jr. once observed that from Rosenwald schools “came the parents of the generation who marched and sang and risked their lives in the revolution for equal justice under the law.”

Though the company was rescued from liquidation this month, Sears’s impact on America faded long ago. But the person who was instrumental in building the business left a legacy that still echoes today.

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*Stephanie Deutsch is the author of “You Need a Schoolhouse: Booker T. Washington, Julius Rosenwald and the Building of Schools for the Segregated South.”*

## Discussion Questions

1. What is the news peg or current situation at Sears?
2. The third individual who made Sears, Roebuck and Co. a household name was Julius Rosenwald.
  - a. What business did this immigrant begin?
  - b. How did he first meet Richard W. Sears and Alvah C. Roebuck?
  - c. What business circumstances brought Rosenwald into the Sears company?
3. What innovations did Rosenwald bring to the business?
4. What is a public offering?
5. In what ways did he initially meet the goals he set in his youth?
6. What influence did Booker T. Washington have on Rosenwald?
7. What is segregation of schools? What was its impact on black children?
8. “[O]ver the two decades before Rosenwald’s death in 1932, [he] built more than 5,000 schoolhouses and related structures in 15 states across the South.” What is the influence of his decision to be a philanthropist? With his schools project?
9. How might the Sears, Roebuck and Co. catalogue shopping experience be compared to today’s online commerce with such companies as Amazon?
10. What do you know of the work of current philanthropists? Select one to read about, summarize his or her life and share with classmates. OR Set a 15-year goal for yourself. What do you think you will be doing?

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# Haitian immigrants revived America's turkey town. This Thanksgiving together might be their last.

*An earthquake united them. U.S. immigration policy may pull them apart.*

BY DAMIAN PALETTA

• Originally Published November 22, 2018

CROIX-DES-BOUQUETS, HAITI — In a proud but unfinished home on a dirt road where goats and children walk together, four generations of one family live under an earthquake-proof roof.

Jean Felix Petit-Frere, a 63-year-old grandfather, has paid for the house's every cinder block, walls that keep his wife of 37 years, two daughters, son-in-law, mother-in-law and granddaughter safe from the chaos and slums that surround them.

But Petit-Frere has never set foot in the house. He lives in North Carolina, working at the world's largest turkey-processing plant, Butterball's facility in the small town of Mount Olive.

Petit-Frere is one of nearly 59,000 Haitians working under a temporary protected status program created for them after a 2010 earthquake triggered a humanitarian crisis. Like many of those immigrants, he sends a large portion of his wages home, a critical financial pipeline to an impoverished country where many



MICHAEL WILLIAMSON/THE WASHINGTON POST

**Turkey feathers line the road in front of a 675,000-square-foot Butterball facility where 17 million turkeys are processed each year at the world's largest turkey-processing plant located in Mount Olive, N.C.**

children bathe in buckets and clean water is sold in bags.

He may not be able to send money home much longer.

President Trump has moved to end the protections for Haitian immigrants, arguing that temporary rules cannot be allowed to remain in place indefinitely. Along with plans to take away similar protections for certain people from Nicaragua, El Salvador and Sudan, Trump's moves

would lead to the deportation of 200,000 workers who have more than 200,000 U.S.-born children.

Immigrants and advocacy groups are suing to block the deportations, and both they and the White House await a ruling in federal court.

The administration says the program has run its course, arguing that temporary rules for Haitians cannot be allowed to remain in place indefinitely.

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MICHAEL S. WILLIAMSON/THE WASHINGTON POST

**Jean Felix Petit-Frere is one of 1,500 Haitian immigrants who moved to Mount Olive, N.C., lured by the prospect of work at Butterball.**



DIEU NALIO CHERY/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**Rose Marie Petit-Frere hangs a shirt to dry at her home in Croix-des-Bouquets, Haiti.**

The ruling has major implications for thousands of Haitian immigrants and their newfound communities, as the two groups have become economically intertwined. Extended families in Haiti rely on wages from relatives in the United States, and U.S. companies — including major American brands like Butterball — need their immigrant workforce.

Some of the Haitians work in big cities such as Miami, but others have transformed small towns like Mount Olive, which was breathed back to life after 1,500 Haitian immigrants moved to the area in the summer of 2010, lured by the prospect of work at Butterball.

Butterball turkeys are one of Thanksgiving's most recognizable brands, and each year the Mount

Olive facility processes 500 million pounds.

The arrival of workers such as Petit-Frere eight years ago reshaped the company and the town around it, filling vacant homes, creating new businesses and injecting money into local grocery stores and retailers that had seen incomes stagnate.

If these workers are sent home, local officials fear it could unwind much of the revival the area has seen in the past eight years.

“If the Haitians and other immigrants suddenly went away, not just in Mount Olive but in eastern North Carolina, agriculture would suffer an amazingly hard blow,” said Charles Brown, the town manager who helped many of them acclimate there. “They’ve contributed to the

economy. They’ve contributed to the labor market.”

The consequences would fall even harder on the families left behind, including Petit-Frere’s wife, Rose Marie. Roughly 60 percent of all Haitians live on less than \$2.41 a day, according to the World Bank. Less than 1 in 4 Haitian families has access to a toilet.

In an interview on the front porch of their incomplete house here, 15 miles northwest of the Haitian capital, Rose Marie said she misses her husband madly but is worried that if he comes home he won’t be able to find sustainable work in a country sliding further into disarray.

He sends almost everything he can spare back to his wife and four children, often more than \$1,000 a

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month. He even overdraws his bank account to stretch the money further.

A new motorbike for his son Jean Caleb, who is one of the only people in this municipality to wear a helmet on the crowded roads. A refrigerator, pigs and goats for Rose Marie. And the new, three-bedroom house that has allowed much of his family to stay close.

Rose Marie appears pinched between the bountiful life he has created for her on his \$13-per-hour wage and the prospect of being back by his side but impoverished, like so many of her neighbors.

Asked when she thinks she will see him again, she put her face in her hands. "I don't know," she says. "Only God knows."

### 'She was dying. I was just crying.'

Petit-Frere works a long late-day shift at Butterball, cleaning floors and equipment. It's usually 2 a.m. before he returns home. By the time he goes to bed, another Haitian immigrant is waking up a few miles away.

Elisena Joseph, also 63, trudges out each morning in thick coveralls and a winter hat. She makes more than \$12 an hour cleaning turkey meat, eclipsing in 60 minutes what she earned in a week selling tomatoes and cabbage on the sidewalk in Port-au-Prince eight years ago.

And it's safe, far from the near-death experience that brought her to North Carolina.

On Jan. 12, 2010, Joseph was walking back from praying on a hillside outside Port-au-Prince when the earth shook beneath her. The

basket of vegetables she had balanced on her head toppled to the ground. When she collected her food and looked up, everything was covered in dust. People were screaming.

The single mother knew three of her children were home alone, and she rushed back to find them.

When she arrived, she saw her daughter, Marie Rosie, lying on the ground unresponsive with a massive gash in the back of her head. A wall had fallen on her and smashed her skull. Joseph managed to get her 26-year-old daughter to a public square, but it was full of the injured and the dead.

After two weeks of desperate pleas, Joseph and Marie Rosie were evacuated by the U.S. government to a hospital in Tampa. They never even had time to say goodbye to the rest of their family.

"There was so much going on in my head," she recalled. "She was dying. I was just crying. I couldn't think of anything."

Haiti's 2010 earthquake was one of the worst natural disasters in the past 100 years, felling thousands of buildings in Port-au-Prince and the surrounding area.

Reports of the quake's death toll vary widely, as an exact count was impossible in the earthquake's chaotic aftermath. But estimates reach as high as 300,000, and in Port-au-Prince, so many people died that relief workers constructed a mass grave on the outskirts of town, dumping hundreds of truckloads of bodies into a massive pit to limit the stench and spread of disease.

Even before the earthquake, Haiti was already considered the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.



MICHAEL S. WILLIAMSON/THE WASHINGTON POST

**There was a housing shortage in Mount Olive, N.C., when 1,500 Haitians arrived in 2010. Since then, some unused homes were refurbished and made available to workers, resulting in a "Little Haiti" neighborhood south of downtown.**

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DIEU NALIO CHERY/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**Cecile Cherisca fixes the hair of her daughter, Ruth Charles, 15, in their one-room apartment in Croix-des-Bouquets, Haiti. Their apartment lacks running water.**

The education system was uneven. Health conditions were very poor. Many people lacked clean running water and used communal pit latrines.

In an effort to help deal with the crisis, the Obama administration modified the existing TPS program, which aimed to allow undocumented immigrants to remain in the United States if conditions in their home countries were unsafe. The change allowed Haitians living in the United States to temporarily stay and legally work. Administration officials said it was unsafe for them to return home to a country on the brink of humanitarian and economic collapse.

Relief groups in Tampa helped Joseph apply while she waited for Marie Rosie to slowly recover.

Finding a job wasn't easy. She

didn't speak English and couldn't read or write, having received little education. Some Haitian friends in Florida told her about Butterball, and in 2012 she took a van up north.

She soon had health insurance, a retirement account and money to help her five children and grandchildren.

She has used her Butterball income to help two of her sons move to Chile, another country where Haitians have found economic opportunity. Now, just one of her five children still lives in Haiti, her eldest daughter Cecile Cherisca, 48.

There are limits, though, to how far the money can stretch. Cherisca and her two children live in a small, one-room apartment in the middle of a densely populated section of Croix-des-Bouquets. Their apartment lacks

running water.

Joseph has so many people depending on her that she sends money to Cherisca only occasionally, helping her pay rent and medical bills.

Cherisca tries to earn more by selling things like ketchup packs and onions from a small table outside her home, but it often yields just \$1 a day. She said she can barely cover other bills, including her daughter's middle school tuition. They share a pit latrine with neighbors.

She said she misses her mother but hopes she stays in the United States, predicting her mother would die given Haiti's worsening condition and uncertain future.

"This country is not going well," she said. "It's like living in evil."

Two thousand miles away, Joseph sleeps in a room that is roughly the same size as her daughter's apartment. It's in a rental house with a clean bathroom, electricity and a furnished kitchen.

There's a single picture frame on her bureau, with the family members they left behind and haven't seen in eight years.

Joseph sleeps on an inflatable mattress in a room she shares with Marie Rosie. Sometimes, at night, her daughter climbs down to join her.

### **'Why are we having all these people?'**

On Jan. 11, one day before the earthquake's eight-year anniversary, Trump berated a group of lawmakers and senior advisers and said he

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wanted the special assistance for Haitians to end.

“Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?” Trump asked, telling them he didn’t want any special provisions made for Haitians as part of a broader immigration deal under consideration.

Seven days later, the Department of Homeland Security published a notice formally terminating TPS for Haitian immigrants. Those with existing permits could work until July 22, 2019, but then they would have to leave.

White House officials have said the program was meant to deal with the aftermath of the earthquake. It was not meant, they say, to remain ongoing while Haiti deals with its long-standing structural problems, which might never be resolved.

“Yes, Haiti had horrible conditions before the earthquake, and those conditions aren’t much better after the earthquake,” then-Homeland Security Secretary John F. Kelly told a congressional panel last year. “But the earthquake was why TPS was — was granted and — and that’s how I have to look at it.”

Because TPS was always meant to be temporary, it must frequently be renewed to prevent it from expiring. The Obama administration did this four times. The Trump administration has extended Haiti’s TPS program once, last year.

A number of federal agencies have warned the White House that terminating the program could further destabilize Haiti. Some have

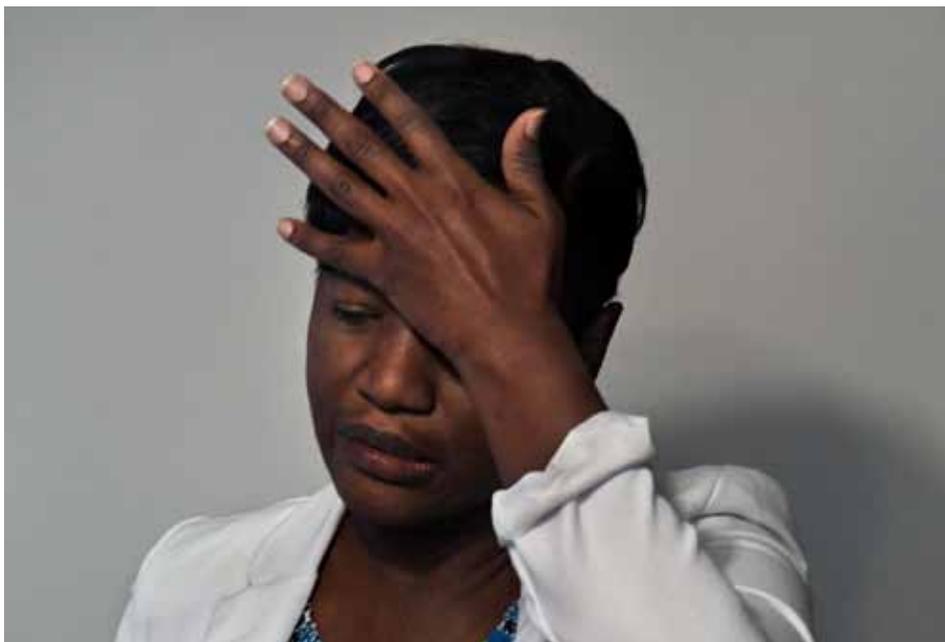
even warned it could lead to more undocumented immigrants’ seeking to enter the United States. Sending thousands of immigrants back to unstable countries could create more desperation, prompting others to try to flee.

“The return of a large number of citizens may place additional security stress upon the Haitian government, which is contending with rising crime and violence,” U.S. Southern Command, a division of the U.S. military, wrote in a memo to other agencies last year.

Less than two months after the White House formally announced it was ending TPS for Haitians, a group of immigrants filed a lawsuit. It alleged the Trump administration’s effort “was motivated by intentional race- and national-origin-based animus.”

On Oct. 3, a federal judge ruled against the Trump administration, finding that the plaintiffs in the case “have established without dispute that local and national economies will be hurt if hundreds of thousands of TPS beneficiaries are uprooted and removed,” as the case would affect people from Haiti, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Sudan. The order temporarily blocked any deportation orders until a final decision is reached.

Even with the court ruling, the White House has not given any indication that it will soften its TPS approach. Trump has expressed frustration that his aides aren’t moving more quickly to deport people who he has said shouldn’t be in the United States. He has alleged the United States has been too accommodative to immigrants for years and that he wants to let



MICHAEL S. WILLIAMSON/THE WASHINGTON POST  
**Marie Rosie Joseph still has bad headaches after a wall fell and smashed her skull during the 2010 earthquake in Haiti**

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MICHAEL S. WILLIAMSON/THE WASHINGTON POST

**Elisena Joseph packs her lunch as she and roommate Nelta Gilles, right, get ready for the van that will drive them to work at the Butterball turkey processing plant.**

in well-educated foreign workers, not people from poor countries like Haiti. He instead expressed a desire to see more immigrants from places like Norway.

### 'A language none of us had ever heard'

Mount Olive is a small town in eastern North Carolina, with its economy closely intertwined with agriculture and food production. The motto on its municipal building reads "We value hometown tradition."

The town's population was dwindling in 2010, but that all changed a few months after the earthquake in Haiti. Petit-Frere was in the group arriving in Mount Olive that summer, promised there was good pay at a company that processes "kodenn," the Haitian Creole word for turkey.

Karen Ingram, senior manager of human resources at Butterball's Mount Olive facility, said Haitians were drawn to the company "through word of mouth," not active recruiting. She said they provided translators and other services to try to help.

But the sudden influx took some members of the town by surprise.

"We had people all over town we hadn't seen before speaking a language none of us had ever heard," said Brown, the Mount Olive town manager. Women walked back from the grocery store with bags on their heads. Newcomers crowded into houses because they didn't know where else to go.

Brown knew the immigrants were there to work at the Butterball plant, which was the largest turkey processing facility in the world and always faced high turnover.

The town is famous for being the hometown of the pickle company that shares its name, but Butterball has the labor-intensive plant that needs the most workers. And these jobs can be very difficult. One recent listing says certain workers must be able to lift "up to 57 pounds" and be able to work "with animal organs and animal feces."

"It's tough, dirty work, and not everyone can do it," Brown said.

Christa Leupen, a Butterball spokeswoman, said finding enough workers for the facility has long been a challenge. Even with the Haitian immigrants at the facility now, the company is seeking to hire 100 new people each week, in part to deal with turnover and demand.

Asked about the Haitian workers, she said, "These folks have been working here for a long time and have been part of the family of the operation."

If they were all deported, especially at once, "that's a significant blow."

Mount Olive had 4,700 people before the earthquake, Brown said, and its population grew by 30 percent when Haitians arrived that summer. He said it helped kick the local economy back to life.

"We've got a Walmart, and they are buying big-screen televisions," Brown said. "They are buying cars. They are buying groceries."

He said they would go together to the local Piggly Wiggly grocery store. Longtime residents would see Haitians spending money in their town every day.

But few of the new workers spoke English or knew U.S. customs and

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laws. Brown needed to find a way to help them adapt.

That winter, the town received a complaint that there were 25 Haitians living in a single small home. Faced with the decision on whether to evict them, Brown told his aides to let them stay, fearing that putting them out in freezing temperatures could put lives at risk. But he knew changes were necessary.

A few months later, Brown called a meeting with Butterball's chief executive and several Mount Olive landlords, explaining that they would all benefit if more was done to help the new residents assimilate.

Brown told the landlords that if they would take steps to fix up older, vacant homes, they would find dozens of eager tenants with good-paying jobs looking for a safe place to live.

This ultimately led to the opening of two Haitian groceries. One of them, God's Grace Convenience Store, is run by an immigrant couple, selling Haitian "patties," baked goods, and a range of vegetables and sodas that are popular in Port-au-Prince.

Nowhere is the Haitian impact more on display than in the six churches they created in Mount Olive. These are loud, pulsating celebrations in old, packed buildings. At several of the assemblies, the guitars and drums are played so loud that the floor vibrates. Lyrics are sung in two languages: at times in English, but the congregations really come to life when they sing in Haitian Creole.

On a recent Sunday, Elisena Joseph sat by the window in the back of the Full Gospel Assembly of North



MICHAEL S. WILLIAMSON/THE WASHINGTON POST

**Charles Brown, Mount Olive's town manager, helped the Haitians assimilate to their new lives in this small town and said they helped kick the local economy back to life.**

Carolina, belting out a hymn with her eyes shut.

### 'Life can make people be apart'

After church, a small kitten with no collar was asleep on a dirty rug behind Jean Felix Petit-Frere's home. Petit-Frere claimed no connection but later admitted he buys the cat food every so often because, as he is, it appears to be all alone. The kitten buried its head in his chest when he picked it up. He calls it Mimi.

Petit-Frere rents a room in the small house on Mount Olive's gritty southern edge. He said he's settled, but there are no decorations, and his belongings are packed in a way that would make it easy to move out quickly. His room had the odor of wet laundry that won't dry. His green Butterball shirt sat at the top of his pile of clothes.

Even though he has lived in Mount Olive eight years, he wants to eventually return to Croix-des-Bouquets and be with his family in the home he has paid to construct. The house in Haiti isn't complete yet. He still needs to pay for a toilet and sink, and the building needs tiles and windows. As much as he misses Rose Marie, he knows it's too soon to return.

"I feel my heart broken," he said. "The Bible says you are supposed to stay close to your wife."

Back in Haiti, Rose Marie sleeps down the hall from her daughters, in a bed with an elaborate, polished headboard Jean Felix carved for her before he left.

She remembers the last time they were together, three years ago, when he came home for their son Obed's wedding.



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## SOCIAL ISSUES

# Ethiopian immigrants turn job niche into labor activism

BY PAMELA CONSTABLE

• Originally Published May 2, 2016

In his native Ethiopia, Bert Bayou was a middle-class professional with a United Nations job. But like tens of thousands of his countrymen, he left his war-torn homeland to start over in the United States. Arriving in Washington in 2001, he used the immigrant grapevine to find low-wage jobs in parking garages and coffee shops where other Ethiopians worked.

Today Bayou, 38, is a labor union official in the District and the veteran of a successful campaign to improve job conditions for garage workers. Now, his union is hoping to organize another niche of Ethiopian employment: the restaurants and newsstands at Reagan National and Dulles International airports.

More than 1,500 people sell snacks and magazines, wait on tables and clean floors at dozens of terminal outlets such as Starbucks and Hudson News, which are under contract at both airports with the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority. Between 60 and 75 percent of those

workers are from Ethiopia, according to union officials.

The environment is bright and modern, with both airports having recently upgraded retail services. Yet many workers earn about \$10 per hour even after years on the job — less than for similar jobs at other major U.S. airports, union leaders say. Workers say their shifts change unpredictably, some companies offer no health benefits and they can be penalized for taking vacations.

“Ethiopians are the predominant ethnic group working at these airports, so these jobs have an outsize impact on our community,” Bayou said last week. “Latinos are the predominant group among janitors, and they have been able to organize and win rights, but our community is being left behind.”

Bayou’s union, a national AFL-CIO affiliate called Unite Here, is taking inspiration from the Service Employees International Union, whose “Justice for Janitors” campaign involved thousands of Central American office cleaners in the Washington area in the 1990s. The group held noisy pickets outside downtown buildings for months.

On April 12, Unite Here staged a brief march by about 50 workers through one terminal at National. Instead of negotiating with more than



KATHERINE FREY/THE WASHINGTON POST

**Seble Delelegn shares the aroma of freshly roasted coffee beans during a meeting of Ethiopian leaders, workers and advocates at Lalibela Cafe in Washington.**

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20 companies that own concessions at the airports, union leaders want the airports authority to set an overall policy on wages and conditions.

“It would be best if the airport authority, which is a public body, would intervene to make sure immigrant workers in the terminal concessions are treated fairly,” said Adam Yalowitz, an official with the union, which has not decided what further actions to take.

Two spokesmen for the airport board, Kim Dibbs and Chris Paolino, said in separate interviews that they had no information about the activities or demands of the union.

Efforts Friday to reach officials at a half-dozen companies that own concessions at National and Dulles were unsuccessful. One owner, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, confirmed that concession workers make an average of \$10 an hour but said the wages are higher than those who work at non-airport outlets.

The Ethiopian-focused campaign comes on top of other recent efforts to organize a variety of low-wage airport workers, such as baggage handlers and cleaners. The SEIU, which represents nearly 20,000 contract workers at 30 U.S. airports, held a one-day strike in March at several major airports including National, demanding higher pay, better conditions and the right to unionize.

There has also been a two-year campaign by Unite Here to organize workers at Baltimore Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport, which has included strikes, proposals for legislation in the



KATHERINE FREY/THE WASHINGTON POST

**Ethiopian leaders, workers and advocates gather at the Lalibela restaurant, including Tseyon Marya, second from left, to talk about their employment issues at National and Dulles airports.**

Maryland General Assembly, and complaints of racial discrimination in wage rates. Many concession workers at BWI are African American. Unite Here represents 35,000 airport workers across the country.

In Washington, the fledgling union campaign signals a growing activism within the region’s large Ethiopian community, best known for its lively restaurants in the District’s Adams Morgan and Shaw neighborhoods. Tens of thousands of Ethiopian refugees and immigrants live in the area, a wave that began during civil conflict in the 1980s and has continued since.

The airport workers are encouraged by other Ethiopians who work in parking garages, and they said their situation improved after the successful unionization drive. They are also being supported by several

Roman Catholic churches and a nonprofit, immigrant-run group in Silver Spring called Dream Ethiopia.

Last week, a dozen airport workers met with Bayou and other union officials at the D.C. restaurant Lalibela. They munched on platters of Ethiopian stew with spongy injera bread, and a woman in a gauzy scarf shook a steaming pan of aromatic coffee beans near each participant in a ceremonial gesture.

The workers didn’t make specific plans that day, but they shared stories of toiling long, unpredictable hours for low pay, taking on multiple jobs to make the rent and send money to their families in Ethiopia, and sometimes being treated callously by managers.

Kasahun Belahu, a man in his 60s, works at three airport outlets for \$9.50 an hour and can barely make

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KATHERINE FREY/THE WASHINGTON POST

**Tseyon Marya, left, and Seble Delelegn were among those who gathered at the restaurant.**

ends meet. Often, he said, his hours are suddenly cut from 40 to 30 a week. “They can take away your [ID] badge for any reason. That’s why we have to have the courage to

speaking up,” he said.

Sabela Dalelegn, 35, the woman whirling around the table with the pan of coffee beans, sat down to recount her struggles. She said she

once asked for a week off without pay after five years — and was fired as soon as she came back.

“I was so desperate,” she said. “I didn’t have money to pay the rent or feed my baby.” Dalelegn pleaded for her job back, and said the manager told her to reapply at the starting wage of \$8 per hour. “We have no equality, no respect. We need a union,” she said.

In a gleaming concourse at National one morning last week, piped music played softly. One cashier at a coffee shop sat behind her register, waiting for the first lunch customers. She said she knew about the union drive but was not involved in it.

“I’m tired,” she said with a sigh. “I have two children, I have been working here nine years, ever since I came to this county, and my pay is still 10 dollars. There was another shop that paid eleven, but I had to get there by 4 a.m.,” she said, shaking her head. “It’s not fair. It’s not enough.”