

Our View

What's causing real-wage stagnation in the US?

Galveston Regional Chamber of Commerce spun up a minor squall last week by joining a lawsuit fighting a federal rule governing how employers determine which employees earn a salary, meaning they don't get overtime pay for hours past 40 in a work-week, and which do get paid at rate at least 1.5 times higher for those extra hours.

Under the new regulations, which go into effect in December, most salaried workers earning up to \$47,476 a year must receive time-and-a-half overtime pay, doubling the threshold from \$23,660.

The chamber, which drew fire on social media, said it was responding to its members. The criticism seems misdirected. The chamber is a business organization whose dues-paying members typically are employers. It's not a labor organization and never has claimed to be.

A better question than should the chamber have joined the opposition, is whether this looming rule change is a good or a bad thing for the economy.

That question is part of a larger conversation underway in Galveston and elsewhere for some time about what constitutes a living wage — as opposed to the federal minimum wage — and whether and how communities can or should mandate or at least attempt to influence employers to pay that higher amount.

The chamber may have irritated some people, maybe a lot of peo-

What you had to say

Last week, we asked people to comment on The Daily News Facebook page about a lawsuit against a new federal overtime rule. Here's what people had to say. Below are all of the comments as of Wednesday.

Suzy Lawson: "Totally disagree with this. I wish it had been in effect last year and I would have been paid for the 200 plus hours overtime I worked."

Anna Grace: "Oh, sorry for closing the loophole that allowed employers to overwork and underpay their employees and keep the profits to themselves."

Ryan Holliday: "If a business has so much work that it continually requires its employees to work overtime, then it needs to hire more people. Being salaried should be a good thing, until you realize it's often just an excuse to work you harder."

Amanda Shipley: "I would be affected by this positively, so that's pretty frustrating."

Shannon Clayton Flanagan: "As a frequent tourist to Galveston, it saddens me to think the chamber would choose to treat its hardworking citizens this way. Shame on them for choosing to support corporate interests who are using a loophole to screw over their constituency."

ple, but it also moved them to talk about this issue, and that's good because it's a conversation this country badly needs to have.

Pretty much everybody from the immensely conservative American Enterprise Institute to allegedly liberal Brookings Institution agrees real wages of American working people have been flat for 40 years.

Ordinary Americans are working more, spending less time on vacation and with their families than at any time in the post-World War II era. We're also making more, but only on paper.

The Pew Research Center reports that in terms of buying power, wages have been flat or have fallen for about the past four decades. People making \$22.41 an hour now are in the same economic shape as people making \$4.03 an hour in 1973, according to Pew's research.

Only workers in the top 10 percent saw any real wage growth from 2000 to 2014, according to Pew, citing data from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Everybody else, which is most of us, was treading water or sinking.

There's a predictable range of opinion about what's causing wage stagnation. Ideological conservatives blame corporate taxes; ideological liberals blame corporate greed. More thoughtful people note that while cash compensation has been flat, employer contributions to nonsalary benefits such as health insurance premiums have risen sharply.

That alone can't account for the whole problem, however, Pew researchers argue. So what is the rest of the problem?

We'd like to hear from readers through letters and guest columns or on our forums and Facebook page.

• Michael A. Smith

A kayak trip gone wrong leads to rescue

Igot a call from the head of Coastal Zone Management last Tuesday saying that one of his guys saw an unoccupied kayak off the jetty at 33rd Street. Most of these are false alarms, but occasionally the real thing happens.

We are working a lighter skeleton crew during the weekdays now so Capt. Tony Pryor was working the field as our "A-Shift Supervisor." As he headed there quickly from 59th Street we received two more calls and another one from the 911 dispatcher. One reported an empty kayak, one said there was someone hanging on the side without a lifejacket, and a third said a person was struggling near the kayak. Supervisor Austin Kirwin was in the weight room working out before his shift started and he volunteered to back up Pryor.

Pryor arrived on the scene, reported that there was a person clinging to the side of a kayak and that the kayak was about 20 yards past the groin. He called he was going in.

When Kirwin arrived on scene a minute later he reported that Pryor was signaling the "OK" sign (arm in a circle with hand touching the head). He responded with the same signal to show he'd received the message and waited on the shoreline as Pryor brought the person to shore.

The victim said it wasn't a big deal and that he was fine but it took awhile to pry the paddle out of his hand. He did have a lifejacket on, but it was loosely buckled and had kind of flipped up and was crooked. It may have been more of a hindrance once he fell in the water. As Kirwin took his information, Pryor swam back out and pulled the boat back in for him.

Fortunately, this call ended well. The man did several things right. He had a lifejacket on and he didn't leave his boat. Although he was in distress he kept it together and didn't panic. These things probably kept him alive until Pryor arrived. Really the one thing that would have helped the most is to not only wear a lifejacket — but to make sure it was sized and fitted properly.

Pryor is a big guy and an ex-college swimmer. He's been lifeguarding for two decades, keeps his skills razor sharp and has made a number of very impressive rescues through the years, although he wouldn't count this among them. But of all the outstanding guards we have, he is probably the one you most want to have on duty when you have your moment of crisis. I know I've always felt a big relief when I've been in tight spots and seen him coming to back me.

The man was using the kayak to paddle a line out for his fishing pole. He seemed really happy to be back on shore. He said from now on he'll use a drone to bring his line out.

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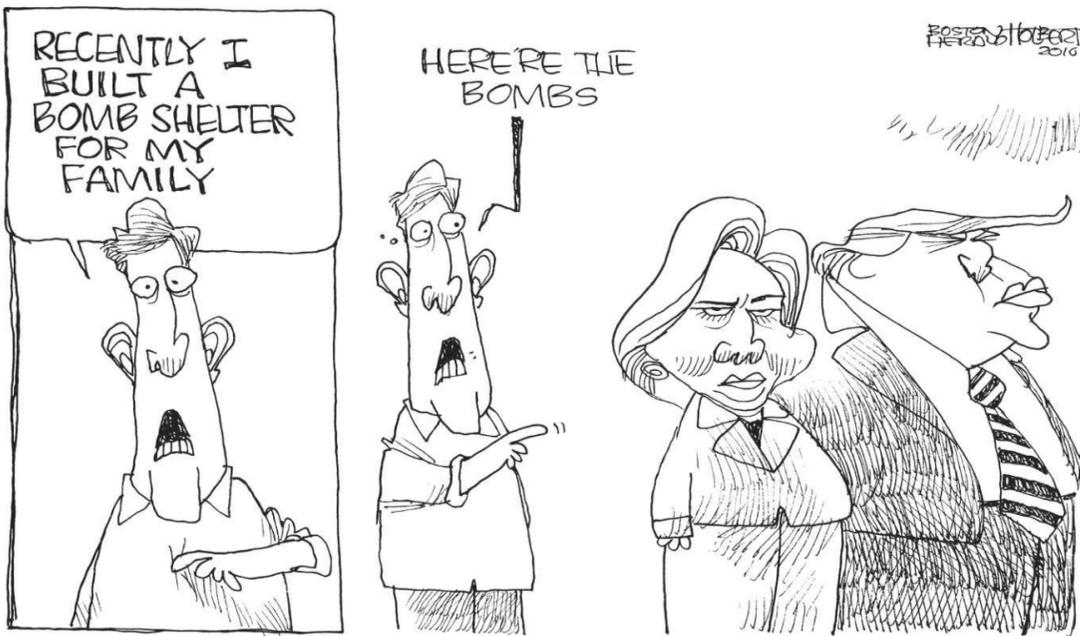
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Meanwhile, at the Bureau of Unlike Things

Our federal government has a "Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives." What do these four things have to do with each other? Little or nothing.

We might just as well have a "Bureau of Bathtubs, Doorknobs, Lawnmowers and Mayonnaise."

**P.J. Bourgeois
Friendswood**

Plant-based diets are good for you and the planet

It seems like there is always some special observance around the corner. There is even a World Day for Farmed Animals. It's observed fittingly on Oct. 2 (Gandhi's birthday). It's intended to memorialize the tens of billions of animals abused and killed for food around the world.

My first instinct was to dismiss it, but I wanted to understand the impact of my diet and my food dollars on others.

Recent undercover investigations showed male baby chicks suffocated in plastic

garbage bags or ground to death, laying hens crowded into small wire cages, injured pigs killed by slamming their heads against the concrete floor and cows skinned and dismembered while still conscious. As theologians debate whether there is life after death, I wondered whether these animals have a life before death and why I should subsidize these barbaric practices.

I wonder no more, as I have now embraced a plant-based diet — green and yellow veggies, legumes, fruits, nuts and some grains. Although I was motivated by compassion for animals, I have since learned that my diet is also great for my health and for the health of the planet.

**Gabriel Chambers
Galveston**

Who does Neil Baron think he's fooling?

It is beyond amusing to see leftists, including lawyer Neil Baron, proclaim the sanctity of court decisions in the era of Obama who has shown absolute disdain for same ("Despite court losses, Texas continues voting shenanigans," The Daily News, Sept. 12). Especially since the president

has packed the courts with activist judges who base their judicial conclusions on the Democrat party agenda.

His claim that voter fraud is rare is another Democrat lie: Pew reports that in 2012, 2.8 million individuals were registered to vote in more than one state; that 1.8 million registered voters were deceased; and that 1/8th of registrations were not accurate, were outdated or were duplicated. In Ohio, Obama won 100 percent of votes in 21 Cleveland districts and 59 in Philadelphia. Wood County, Ohio, had 98,213 residents of voting age, yet there were 106,258 registered (ditto in 10 Colorado counties).

The Department of Justice couldn't find one voter who was disenfranchised by the Texas Voter ID law. Obama's Fourth Circuit even patronizingly observed that black voters are "less sophisticated" in spite of the fact black North Carolinians, after the passage of a similar law, voted at higher rates than whites.

Recall that Democrat-sponsored ACORN was caught submitting hundreds of thousands of fake voter registrations across the country.

**Ed Hooven
Galveston**