Corporate profits continue to reach record highs, year after year, yet workers have not received a considerable raise in half a century. CEOs are making more than three hundred times the average worker, and despite living in the richest country in the world at its richest point in history, our overall standard of living is going down. This is a moral and an economic crisis.

The disparity in our economy causes pain. People are forced to choose between buying food, or paying rent. Consumers are being cheated out of hard-earned money. Seniors are working well past retirement age, just to make ends meet. These are the realities for working people while corporations cart more and more riches to the bank.

Republicans, and too many Democrats, have rigged our economy to enrich a select few at the expense of everyday, hard-working Americans. It has been a direct assault on our deeply held national values of unity, justice and broad opportunity. It’s been done under the guise of creating jobs, and is justified by a fanatical economic theory that seeks to remove or destroy anything - especially unions – seen as a barrier to the free market.

Today, instead of quality of life, politicians speak of “growth” as if it is the answer to all problems, an economic good without negative externalities. In May of 1964, President Lyndon Johnson shared his vision of a “Great Society.” It was a vision of health, education and American community. But more than anything else, it was a vision built on the idea that we have the agency to make our future.

He suggested that we already had enough wealth; greater labors of Sisyphus were no longer necessary. It was time to elevate quality above quantity. LBJ said, “For a century we labored to settle and to subdue a continent. For half a century we called upon unbounded invention and untiring industry to create an order of plenty for all of our people. The challenge of the next half century is whether we have the wisdom to use that wealth to enrich and elevate our national life and to advance the quality of our American civilization.”

The demands of commerce reign supreme when it comes to railroading. Quality of life for many has fallen with the introduction of Precision Scheduled Railroading - except for wealthy investors who have little concern for anything other than their bottom lines. These investors are fickle, and when they have extracted every last cent out of the railroad industry, they will move on to the next sector. Meanwhile, we will be left with a hollowed-out system that does not serve its customers, has abandoned safety, and has pushed out thousands of skilled workers who may never return.

More than a half century ago, LBJ chose not to believe that Americans were condemned to “soulless wealth.” He elucidated a new dream valuing quality of life above quantity of stuff. Looking back on his words, we see how far we have not come and how far we still must travel.

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