

Jeff's Jottings

Labor Day

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*May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;
establish the work of our hands for us —
yes, establish the work of our hands.*

Psalm 90:17

It's now a holiday better known as the last real weekend opportunity at the cabin up north, or the beginning of the football season.

That wasn't the original intent of Labor Day, of course. The inspiration first of a few municipalities and states in the years after the Civil War, Labor Day became a national holiday in 1884, a time set aside to acknowledge the contributions workers have made to the strength, prosperity, and well-being of our country. I doubt those congressmen (yes, they were all men then) realized then what fertile ground they were creating for mattress sales.

This Labor Day, the national unemployment rate is 3.9 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the lowest in more than a decade and more than five-and-a-half points lower than nine years ago, in the middle of the great recession. The economy is growing. People have jobs. That's good news.

This isn't. Today's real average wage (that is, the wage after accounting for inflation) has about the same purchasing power it did 40 years ago, according to the Pew Research Center. And what wage gains there have been have mostly flowed to the highest-paid tier of workers.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, much of life is economic theory. Where you shop, what you buy, how you invest, what policies you support — we say

it's personal, but our decisions all have impacts and implications, not just for us, but for the economy of this country and of the world. And it's not easy to sort it all out. Economies are complex, and beyond that, there are enough theories out there to support about any point of view.

Labor Day also begins the stretch run to the November election, and we will most certainly hear our economic future debated during these next two months. I will be listening this fall for what candidates are proposing for all workers — all God's children. Real words, with real benefits, for real workers, and not simply posturing and candidate-speak.

It's Labor Day weekend. Enjoy the lake, the State Fair, the Gophers game, the mall, family and friends. And also say thanks for all those who work to put food on our tables, roofs over our heads, and comfort in our lives.