



Food for thought

How rich do you have to be before you spread the wealth around? In a recent column in the New York Times, Nicholas Kristof points out that Trump's tax cut "made inequality worse. In 2018, for the first time, the 400 richest American households paid a lower average tax rate than any other income group." In 1950, these billionaires paid about 70 percent in taxes. In 2018, their tax rate was 23 percent.

The tax system in the United States has grown increasingly regressive, as we've seen in Nevada where we have one of the highest sales tax rates in the nation and no state income tax, shielding the wealthy from paying their fair share while dumping the burden of funding public education on the poor. It's immoral.

All of this is cheered by our braggart President, who seems to be worth far less than he thinks in every way—financially, business aptitude and certainly moral fiber. His administration continues to find ways to make life harder for those on the

struggling side of life, like the new rule that will take away a free school lunch from about a million children.

Trump wants to close "loopholes" in the school lunch program so fewer children qualify for a free lunch. But why punish children whose parents refuse to fill out an application by making sure they go hungry at lunchtime? Why make it harder for parents who earn just above the official poverty level of \$25,000 for a family of four by cutting their children off of lunch? In a country as rich as the United States, why aren't we providing all children with a school lunch regardless of income?

And the rich aren't done building their fortunes. Reno was the dateline for a front-page New York Times article on Sunday outlining the clever manipulation of Opportunity Zones by Lake Tahoe resident and convicted felon Michael Milken who worked with Nevada politicians and Trump-appointed Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin to benefit himself.

It's embarrassing for Nevada to be so easily played by the rich. But not unusual. We might as well hang a sign on the front doors of the Legislature and the Governor's Office that says, "Open for Business: Rich People Only."

The latest scandal involves Milken's investments in the industrial park in Storey County where other corporate parasites like Tesla and Switch feed on taxpayer subsidies and, surprisingly, in the new project replacing Park Lane Mall in central Reno. It turns out that last year the Treasury Department was persuaded to ignore internal guidelines and designate these areas for tax breaks as Opportunity Zones, which are supposed to help distressed neighborhoods—not wealthy investors. Secretary Mnuchin made the decision himself, after visiting with Milken at an event hosted by the Milken Institute, a nonprofit think tank devoted to "advancing prosperity."

Nevada had tried to get the industrial park included as an Opportunity Zone

before, but Treasury officials said the area wasn't eligible "because its residents were too affluent." But that changed when Milken joined forces with Mnuchin, former Congressman Jon Porter—now a lobbyist—Senator Dean Heller and Governor Brian Sandoval. The area was "re-nominated" and quickly approved, giving wealthy investors an unwarranted financial payday.

Treasury and Internal Revenue Service officials were reportedly furious. One wrote an internal memo that condemned the corruption, saying the "arbitrary Treasury standards risked opening the door for accusations that the determination process was influenced by political considerations or bias."

Meanwhile, Nevada schools struggle to feed their children. Our mentally ill camp out in city parks and along the river because there is no where for them to go. Spiking rents continue to cause misery for the working class.

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