

# Opinion: Hiding exploitation behind an app

After expenses, workers for companies like Uber often make well below the federal minimum wage. But many are now fighting back

By Lena Simet, senior economic justice and rights researcher and advocate at human Rights Watch.

Alejandro thought that driving full-time for Uber offered freedom — flexible hours, quick cash, and time to care for his young son. But that promise faded fast.

“There are hours when I make \$20,” he told me. “And there are hours when I make \$2.” As his pay dropped, he pawned his computer and camera, began rationing his insulin, and started driving seven days a week just to break even.

Alejandro, whose real name is withheld for his privacy, is one of millions of workers powering a billion-dollar labor model built on legal loopholes.

Companies like Uber insist they are “tech platforms,” not employers, and that their workers are “independent contractors,” not employees. This sleight of hand allows them to sidestep minimum wage laws, paid sick leave, and other workplace protections while shifting risks onto workers. It also lets them avoid employer taxes, draining funds from public coffers.

A new Human Rights Watch report looks at seven major platform companies — Amazon Flex, DoorDash, Favor, Instacart, Lyft, Shipt, and Uber — and finds that their labor model violates international human rights standards.

These companies promise flexibility and opportunity, but the reality for many workers is far more precarious. In a survey of 127 platform workers in Texas, we found that after subtracting expenses and benefits, the median hourly pay was just \$5.12, including tips — well below the already paltry federal minimum wage.

Seventy-five percent of workers we surveyed said they struggled to pay for housing. Thirty-five percent said they couldn’t cover a \$400 emergency expense. Over a third had been in a work-related car accident. Many said they sold possessions, relied on food stamps, or borrowed from family and friends to get by.

Their labor keeps the system running — but the system isn’t built to work for them.

By classifying workers as contractors, platform companies avoid paying core employment obligations while retaining tight control over how the work is done. The platforms often use algorithms and automated systems to assign jobs, set pay rates, monitor performance, and deactivate workers without warning.

One Uber driver in Houston said, “They are like puppet masters. They psychologically manipulate you.”

One Shipt worker in Michigan said her pay plummeted immediately after she received two four-star reviews, down from her usual five. Ratings are hard to challenge, and recovering from a low score can take weeks. Workers feel forced to accept every job and appease every customer, reinforcing a system that rewards compliance over fairness.

These aren’t the conditions of self-employment. They’re the conditions of control.

This labor model also drains public resources. In Texas alone, Human Rights Watch estimates that misclassification of platform workers cost the state over \$111 million in unemployment insurance contributions between 2020 and 2022 — a quiet transfer of public wealth into private hands.

But workers are pushing back, and policymakers are starting to listen. At this June’s UN-backed International Labour Conference, for example, a binding treaty on platform work is under discussion.

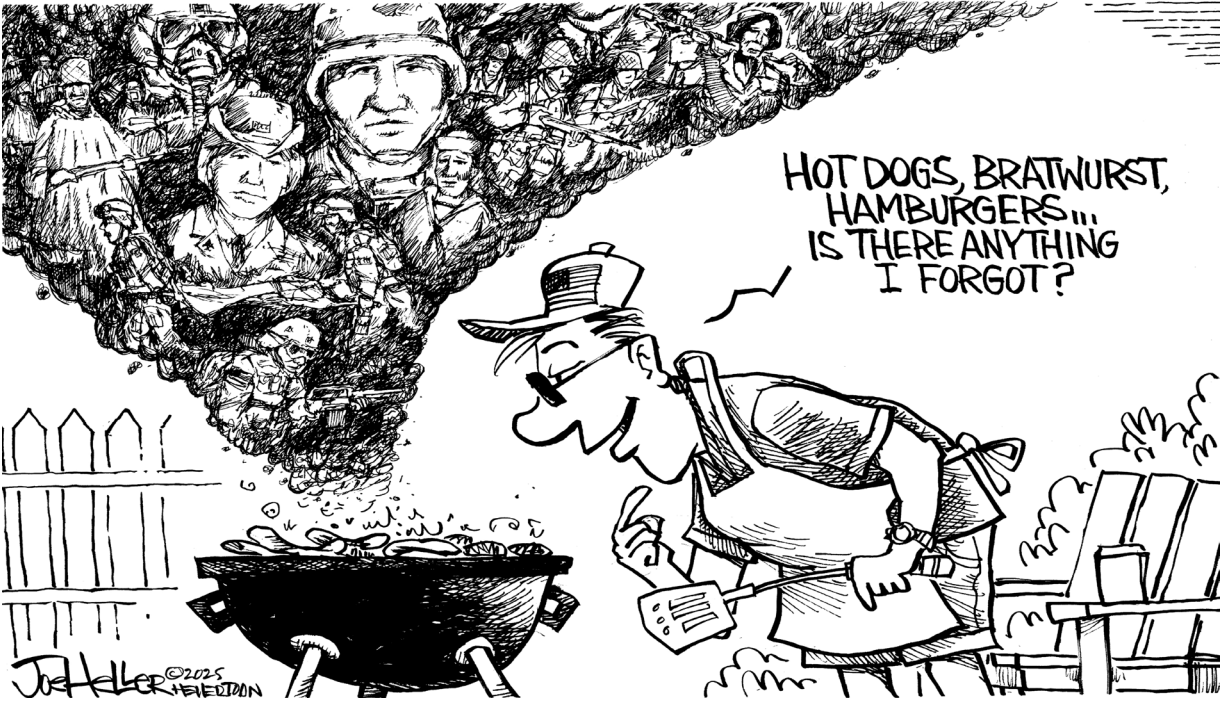
The message is clear: workers are demanding rules that protect their rights.

The U.S. can start by updating employment classification standards and adopting clear criteria to determine whether a platform worker is truly independent. We also need greater transparency. If gig workers were properly classified, public companies would have to disclose pay data, showing just how far below the median these workers earn — and how high executive compensation soars above them.

This isn’t about rejecting technology. It’s about making sure companies don’t hide exploitation behind an app. Alejandro has a right to a wage he can live on, protections he can count on, and a system that doesn’t punish him for getting sick, injured, or speaking up.

He and millions like him built the platform economy. It’s time they shared more than the burden.

OtherWords commentaries are free to re-publish in print and online - all it takes is a simple attribution to OtherWords.org

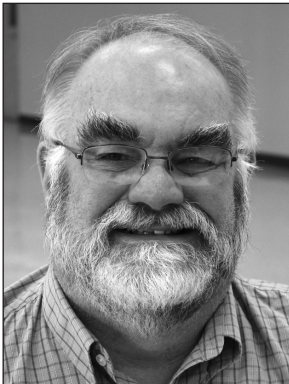


# Opinion: Checks & balances

by Perry Landon, Devils Lake, ND

While millions of people across the country protest the horrific policies and edicts of the Trump administration, I am sensing that those knowledgeable and interested in how our country operates are becoming more engaged. However, millions remain in the willful ignorance and gullibility fog that typifies being a cult member. This fog is something that is counted on by the Trump administration to allow them to rule, not govern, in a manner that is corrupt, chaotic, and cruel. Cruelty and fear are two of the main factors used to quickly subjugate the population into willing participants in destroying our democracy. Also, establishing rule of the country by a small, unrepresentative group of those with pure profit corporate interests and the morbidly wealthy to support an authoritarian dictator with corrupt transactional instincts to oversee the function of government.

It is mystifying to have millions of people see a president constantly lie and somehow find false statements and misdirection to be truthful. An insurrection took place at the capital and somehow it is being whitewashed into a normal tourist visit. It is rightfully seen horrific event intended to overturn the rightful, no real evidence of election rigging exists, election of Joe Biden. We have seen the establishment of, if not illegal, highly questionable Department



Landon

of Government Efficiency (DOGE) with the intended purpose of addressing waste, fraud and abuse in government and producing a more efficient operation of government not the random, reckless, and thoughtless destruction of government operations. We have seen the president talk about annexing Greenland, even considering using military force, because of its strategic location and untapped mineral resources. He has envisioned Canada becoming the 51<sup>st</sup> state for no real or strategic reason. The president has stated that he does not feel compelled to follow the U.S. Constitution as he performs his duties as president, yet swore an oath to preserve, protect, and defend the U.S. Constitution at his most recent inauguration.

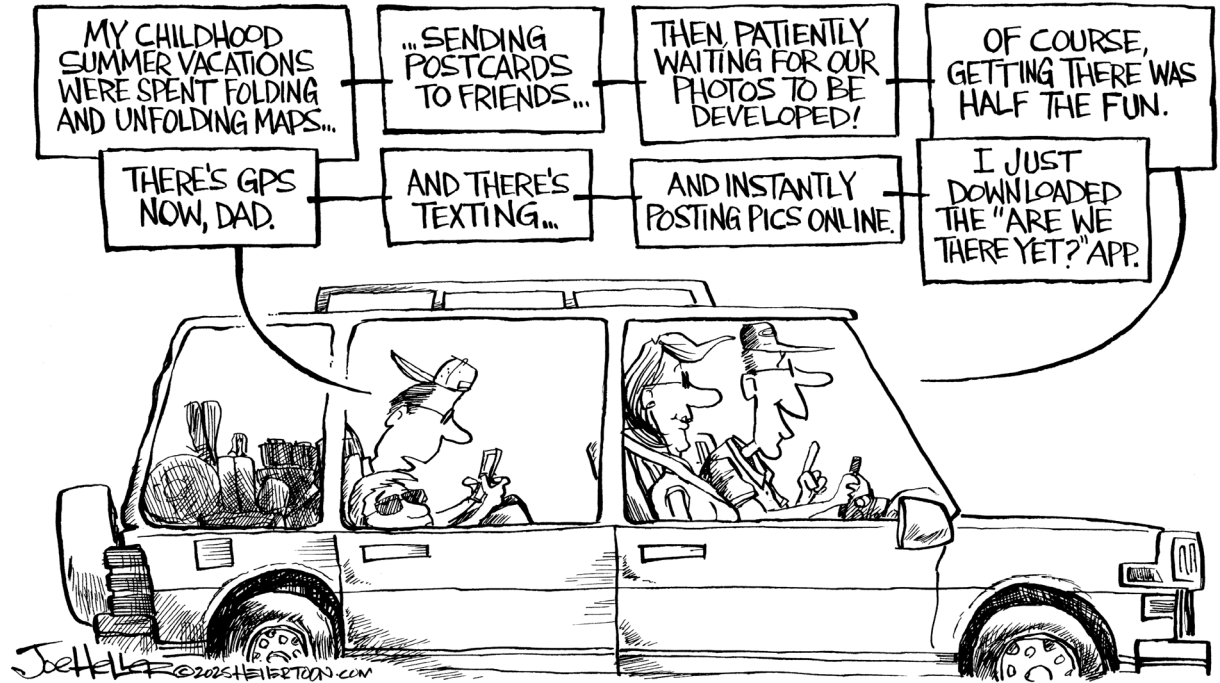
The Congress, which is currently controlled by Republicans, has been defanged as a co-equal branch of government abdicating most of their constitutional duties to the president. We have seen news networks, national recognized colleges, judges, major corporations, major law

firms threatened with government retaliation, funding cuts and restricted government access. The founding fathers established the Executive Branch, Congress and the Judiciary as co-equal branches of government to provide checks (accountability) and balances (rigorous oversight) to ensure that no one branch would become too powerful and dominate the other two branches. Now that the Republican Congress has been eliminated as a co-equal branch of government the focus has shifted to the Judiciary. Every effort is being used, most notably intimidation and fear to make the judiciary toe the line and not use the constitution to roadblock the Trumpian reorganization of government into something other than a functioning representative democracy.

How will the public react if the first amendment involving free speech is obliterated by this time next year. All that is left for the public to consume as approved public media consumption are lies, propaganda and misinformation because the current president was able to usurp the power and responsibility of the judiciary. Taking away one of the founding principles of how we the people govern ourselves means that nothing in the constitution is beyond being misinterpreted or just ignored by the current presidential administration. The founding fathers expressed great concern that ignorant and

ill-informed public could elect deceitful and corrupt leaders that would not represent the interests of the public to form a more perfect union. Now that we have elected such a man the end results will likely prove horrific for most of the citizens of the country.

During the first few months of the current administration, the destruction has been so pervasive that it will take years to recover, providing we the people are ever allowed to reclaim our means of self-governing. If the current administration is allowed to go unrestricted by Congress or the Judiciary for the entirety of the four-year term, the level of destruction could be so severe that would take decades to fully recover, and any remnant of democracy is no longer in place that would ever allow the country to recover. It has been fascinating to watch non-MAGA voters and Trump voters to now express disbelief that he is doing the horrible things he is doing when he told them what he was going to do. There was a 900+ page plan of action known as Project 2025 that was authored by many members of the current administration, and it has been estimated that half of the Project 2025 agenda has already been implemented. Surprisingly, he is a narcissistic, cruel, lying, lawless, vain wannabe totalitarian dictator that has no real morality, compassion or empathy for our society.



Devils Lake Journal, 155-940 is published Tuesday and Thursday at 516 4th Street NE, Devils Lake, ND 58301

Periodicals postage paid at Devils Lake, ND 58301

Postmaster: Send address changes to: Devils Lake Journal, 516 4th Street NE, Devils Lake, ND 58301



DEVILS LAKE JOURNAL

CUSTOMER SERVICE OFFICE HOURS

MONDAY -THURSDAY 8-5

Friday 8-3

CONTACTS:

Kathy Svidal, Publisher: ksvidal@devilslakejournal.com

Louise Oleson, Editor: loleson@cmpapers.com

Deb Toso, Advertising: dtoso@cmpapers.com

Jen Schwab, Classifieds: classifieds@devilslakejournal.com

Kris Olson, Legal Notices: kolson@devilslakejournal.com

Joseph Hill, Sports Writer: jhill@devilslakejournal.com

Subscriptions: carlien@devilslakejournal.com