

OPINION // OPEN FORUM

Low-wage workers in peril

By Joan M. Graff

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In this Nov. 19, 2016 file photo, President-elect Donald Trump walks with CKE Restaurants CEO Andy Puzder from Trump National Golf Club Bedminster clubhouse in Bedminster, N.J.

Photo: Carolyn Kaster, Associated Press

It's clear that Labor Secretary nominee Andrew Puzder disdains the mission of the nearly 104-year-old agency he is nominated to run. As the steward of workers' rights, the Department of Labor is charged with ensuring that workers are paid fairly and that their rights to a safe and healthy workplace free of harassment are secure.

working families live in poverty. And during his tenure as CEO of CKE Restaurants Holdings Inc., the fast-food empire has racked up an abysmal record of wage violations and sexual harassment. It is no wonder he says he would prefer robots to people on his payroll.

His appointment betrays the trust of those who voted for Trump based on the repeated promise at the heart of his campaign: to help workers who have been left behind.

But it gets worse. On Inauguration Day, the White House blocked access to basic public information on the Department of Labor's website, including a database of enforcement actions, the department's stock in trade. For good measure, it also removed or obscured basic information on workplace rights. And Trump has promised to "roll back"

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less.

These actions cannot be excused as shifts in policies. In our democratic society, we rely on public information from our government about our rights. Only the newly minted notion of "alternative facts," which means no facts at all, can explain what the White House has done at the Department of Labor and other agencies. The administration is deliberately undermining the transparency of our federal government and the essential dissemination of laws and information.

immigrants, women, people of color, disabled people, the LGBTQ community, and other groups. It threatens all working people nationwide. We await with great concern the announcements of nominees to the National Labor Relations Board and the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice.

We urge the Senate's Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee to vote against Puzder's confirmation. We call on Trump to fulfill his promise to help working people by nominating a labor secretary who supports raising the minimum wage and will enforce workers' rights instead of denigrating them. And we urge the president to reverse his administration's dangerous stance on public records and public information.

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vigorously enforce its labor and employment laws, and we have a rich network of strong nonprofit organizations that advocate for workers and expanded workplace protections. Mindful of the threats posed by a Trump administration, our Legislature has retained former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to provide counsel on resisting any attempts to curtail California's laws. Our new state attorney general, Xavier Becerra, has promised to fight any attempt by the Trump administration to undercut California's policies on civil and workplace rights, the environment, and immigration. San Francisco's Mayor Ed Lee responded to

undocumented residents. And we are proud to support our governor, Jerry Brown, who has a long record of standing by the workers of our state.

In California, workers have a fighting chance.

*Joan M. Graff is president of Legal Aid at Work, formerly the Legal Aid Society-Employment Law Center:
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Concerned? Get involved

Voters should call or write to committee members listed on the Senate’s website (www.help.senate.gov/about/members) here before Puzder’s confirmation hearing, now set for Feb. 7.

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