

When the Civil Rights Act passed in 1964 I was 13 years old. I wasn't paying too much attention to politics at the time but I do remember thinking this was a problem that we fixed and that was a good thing. For close to 56 years, because of this legislation, I have thought that all people of the United States were equally protected under the law. But that thinking was the result of my white privilege naiveté.

The exclusion of farm workers from the federal Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 is what I would now consider a textbook example of systemic racism. Nowhere in this exclusion statement is there mention of race, indigenous groups, or people of color – “equal protection under the law”. But make no mistake about it, this is the targeted group. These are by and large the people who labor for low wages and, in many cases, without overtime so that food can be brought to American tables at a price subsidized by cheap labor. In fact, I have heard the argument from a number of people who own farms, that agricultural policies are based on the premise of unfair wage and labor practices.

Would passage of this bill create a hardship on farm owners who hire these workers? Absolutely. Would voting this bill down and keeping the current practices continue the hardships of agricultural workers? Absolutely! One way to weight an ethical argument over difficult decisions (you don't want to harm either group) is to ask “Which decision offers the greatest good to the greatest number of people”. That question falls in favor of the workers. Perhaps an even more important consideration is “Which group will be more able to work within the system to change the agricultural rules and regulations that make it difficult for farms to turn a profit?”.

And, finally, there is the question of fundamental human rights. I trust you agree with me that every person has the right to live a life marked with dignity and respect regardless of their color, education, cultural heritage, gender, or other human quality. I don't believe this right extends to farm or any other ownership. It is the duty of all of us to ensure that basic rights never take a back seat to privilege.

Here before you is a chance to address the wrongs still inherent to a system that claims equal justice for all it's citizen. I urge you to make the most of this opportunity and call for the passage of LD 1022.

Respectfully,

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Monroe