

Reaction to Editorial by Maureen Conway, executive director of the Economic Opportunities Program at the Aspen Institute and **Shelly Steward**, director of the Future of Work Initiative at the Aspen Institute

- 1 The Sept. 14 editorial objecting to California's Fast-Food Accountability and Standards Recovery Act, "This labor law needs some work," recognized that workers in the industry are experiencing real harms: wage theft, discrimination, harassment and other violations.
- 2 The idea that we should tolerate poverty wages so that consumers can avoid a 17 percent increase in fast-food costs is morally problematic. Is it right to perpetuate a system that exploits people so that other people can save a buck on a hamburger? Although some franchise owners are technically small businesses, they operate in the context of large corporations whose onerous rules push them to adopt these abusive labor practices. Industry-wide standards raise standards as a whole, and as such do not place individual franchises at a competitive disadvantage.
- 3 The proffered "better way" of enforcing existing labor law and expanding the earned-income tax credit would certainly be a good thing, but we should also ask ourselves how far we want to go in asking taxpayers to underwrite the paychecks of working people. Moreover, one of the enforcement challenges is how difficult it is for workers 39 violations. The Fast-Food Councils created by California's new legislation would create a far better vehicle for workers to surface violations than currently exists.
- 4 Fast-food is big business. It has been hugely profitable and should pay its own bills. And if it has a habit of not following the rules, then new structures to bring it in line should be celebrated.

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