



From the Director's Desk - Cracks in Toxic Conformity

Like the NYT, in [Mitch McConnell vs. Republicans](#) I'm not sure of motives, nor should too much be made of the rift, though coming from the master of keeping colleagues in line, it must be said that democracy needs more squabbling within the parties and less conformity if it is to survive these times. The same goes for the rift between other Senate Democrats and Senator Manchin. His motives may be protecting his own investments in coal rather than principles. So what. We should celebrate the actions of both Senators nonetheless. Their actions put cracks in the tiresome and dangerous idea of a Red and a Blue America.



One would be forgiven for thinking there are only two types of people in America today. I recently read about George Packers idea that there are [Four Americas](#) from the Atlantic, now a book of a different name referenced below. Of course, there are infinitely more than only 4 American types. Yet the hype these days about two irreconcilable factions in America feels entrenched. Thinking of Packers Four Americas: Free, Real, Smart and Just "Americas" is an interesting if overly-simple model. Contemplating that model helps shift away from the bi-polar paradigm and confronts what has become a widely accepted toxic conformity that arises from the "two sides" mindset.

This issue isn't just about Congress or parties. I've spoken before to those serving on local boards that silence and conformity are derelictions of duty. I don't usually say it so harshly. Most decisions that arise to a public hearing are not simple. Nor are most individuals monolithic in their perspectives. Yet when there is vehemence from the public on a topic, there is a strong drive in those on a board to symbolically close ranks for a "consensus" vote. This is an unfortunate, undemocratic impulse. Deliberating through all four corners of an issue is one way to diffuse the concept of one side "winning" while another must lose.

So how is it that we regularly allow cowardly performances of agreement to replace debate, discussion and dissent?

It takes courage to wade into dissent; to acknowledge truths embedded in what is said by those with whom you ultimately may disagree. Nor is it fun to disagree with fellow board members or fellow citizens. One may just be persuaded. It may take longer. It also takes awareness, effort and practice.

The forces driving conformity today include.....[READ MORE HERE](#)

Slope & Hatch - Elevated Dining Experience Made Possible through Northwest Loan Fund



For 20 years, Gregg Lemkau was a lawyer practicing immigration, real estate, and banking law – but always in the back of his mind, he had an interest in the culinary arts. After two decades in law, he was ready for a change. With seed money he'd saved and an SBA loan, he purchased Rocky Mountain Pizza Company in Glenwood Springs.

Of his first foray into the food and beverage industry Gregg said, "That adventure helped me to realize that, while I might not have had the experience to create a restaurant from scratch, my time in the legal industry gave me a different view of business operations that somehow worked. It helped me succeed in turning an existing restaurant into something bigger and more successful. There is always some luck in success, but a ton of hard work and an outsider's view of the industry definitely helped."

When the opportunity arose for him to purchase *Slope & Hatch*, Gregg reached out to the Northwest Loan Fund (NLF) and Anita Cameron. He'd been referred to her by former NLF clients who were happy with her work. Lemkau was impressed with how quick and easy Anita made things and especially appreciated her personal touch.

Gregg was asked why the loan was important to him and he responded, "It allows me to dive into another 'restaurant adventure.' Obviously, I want to make a good life for myself and my family. But there is more. It has also become clear to me that the service industry is a path to, if I am lucky, elevate others' lives through an engaging team environment or greater earnings for our employees. Once again, I did not create this restaurant, but I am trying my best to make it better in various ways."

He and his team recognize that the previous owner created something special, and they are just trying to take it that one step further by making small tweaks to the menu. He said, "We've recently begun to roll out craft cocktails to elevate the dining experience as well and will slowly build a new cocktail menu with agave-based spirits, whiskey, and maybe even a small amaro collection. I am also trying (we'll see whether I am successful or not) to equalize the pay structure within a restaurant that existed for years based on a disparate pay structure."

It's obvious Gregg made the right decision when he switched to owning restaurants in the Rocky Mountains when he can finally take a moment after a busy night with his crew to celebrate how smooth everything worked. He especially enjoys seeing the locals and tourists alike, gather to create memories in a place with good food and hardworking staff.

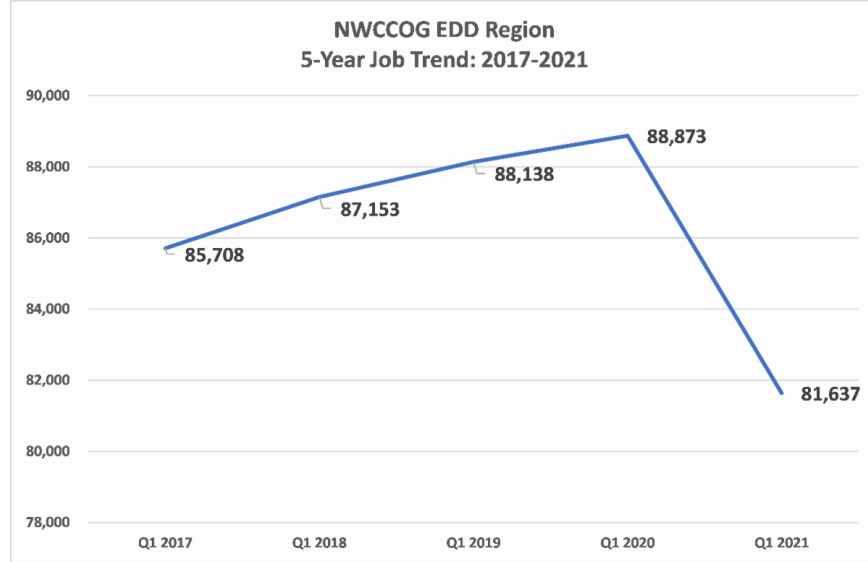
The Northwest Loan Fund is proud to have supported this business acquisition.

Labor Shortage in our Region: Many Factors at Play

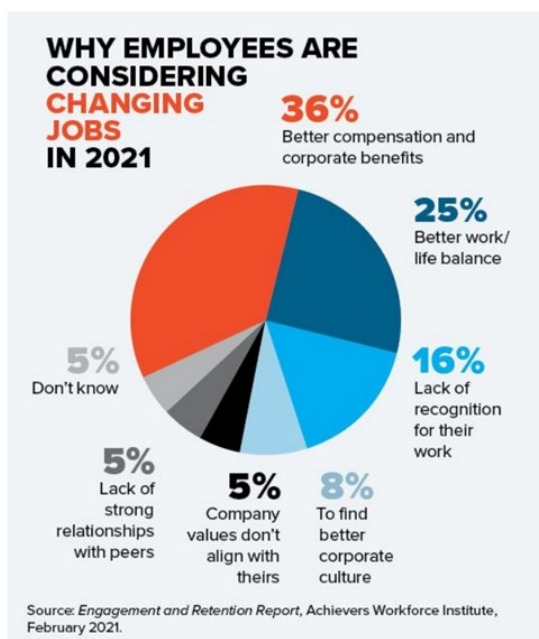
By Rachel Tuyn, Director, NWCCOG Economic Development District

At the January 27th NWCCOG Economic Development District Board of Directors meeting, the team from the Colorado Department of Labor presented on an issue that is impacting our region: the labor shortage. Mark Hoblitzell, Christina Oxley, and Carolyn Tucker, business services representatives for CDLE serving our region, led a discussion on reasons for the labor shortage, and how it is impacting our region. Full presentation can be found on NWCCOG EDD website [HERE](#).

The region lost 7,236 jobs due to the pandemic; 4,600 of the jobs lost were in the Accommodations and Food Services industry, and Arts Entertainment and Recreation industry. These 4,600 jobs are what make our tourism-based economy run: restaurant servers, front desk clerks, lift operators, housekeepers, shuttle drivers, retail workers. These are not jobs that can be done "remotely".



The question is: will these jobs come back? There are many factors at play here: the pandemic made the housing crisis in our region even worse due to in-migration and investors outcompeting the workforce for housing; many women have not returned to the labor force due to lack of childcare and concerns over the virus still being transmitted to children; the pandemic was hard on front line workers, having to act in an enforcement capacity making sure guests were wearing their masks; and the low pay offered by many of the service level jobs. Also, according to CDLE's report to the board, 45% of the current NWCCOG region workforce is nearing retirement age.



There is a new term very prevalent in discussions today about the labor shortage: the "Great Resignation". But as a Washington Post article points out, it may be more of a "reassessment" rather than a resignation. The article states "there is also growing evidence that a lot of people want to do something different with their lives than they did before the pandemic. The [coronavirus](#) outbreak has had a dramatic psychological effect on workers, and people are reassessing what they want to do and how they want to work, whether in an office, at home or some hybrid combination" [Washington Post](#).

According to data presented by CDLE on why workers are considering changing jobs, 36% site better pay and benefits and 25% site better work/life balance. Mark Hoblitzell points out that "workers are feeling more empowered than ever to change jobs such that it better suits them...better financially, better for taking care of their families, better for work/life balance. The worker has a lot more power than

they used to".

A positive sign is that perhaps workers leaving the labor force and deciding to start new businesses. Over the last year, 120 new establishments were created in the Professional, Technical, Scientific sector, which pays an annual average salary ranging from \$74,000 - \$100,000 in the NWCCOG Region.

Large employers are seeing the writing on the wall, and some are taking action. Aspen Skiing Company recently announced a "surprise mid-season pay increase". The Aspen Skiing Co. announced Thursday that all hourly and salaried employees of the Aspen Skiing Co. would receive a \$3 per hour pay raise effective Sunday ([Aspen Times](#)). The pay increase affects some 4,000 Skico workers in the Roaring Fork Valley. With the latest increase, the starting pay at the skiing company is \$20 per hour for most hourly employees. For salaried workers, the latest increase represents a \$6,240 annual increase.

There are many dynamics at play regarding the future of work, labor force trends, and how these trends will affect the key industries which make up the core economic base of our region. The EDD board of directors had a lively discussion about these issues following CDLE's presentation on January 27. The good news is we have an engaged, dedicated group of leaders including elected officials, town managers, planners, non-profits, state and federal agency partners in our region rolling up their sleeves every day to work on these issues.

Heard around the Region

Skippy Mesirow, Aspen Council Member:

Aspen units are 68% vacant. There are only 20 jobs in Aspen that pay enough to afford a market value home.

Sarah Vaine, Summit County Assistant Manager:

The 2018 Strong Future Ballot Initiative is now producing \$2million/year for mental health which supports in school therapists, more consistent substance abuse response, suicide education, the SMART community response team and other initiatives. Summit County still lost 10 behavioral health clinicians in 2021 to housing/cost of living issues

Number of hours required to become a licensed mental health provider 2000 hours. Summit County has scholarships, internships and is paying for certifications.

Chris Lindley, Executive Director Eagle Valley Behavioral Health:

Eagle County experienced 16 suicides in 2017, 17 in 2018, 11 in 2019, and last year 25% of middle schoolers considered suicide, 16% had a plan

Today 93% of behavioral health providers accept insurance, and there is a scholarship program called Olivia's Fund

"If you are waiting for the state or feds to fix behavioral health you will continue to wait."

Leading causes of death are similar across communities

Summit	Park	Grand	Lake
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unintentional Injuries• Suicide• Cancer• Chronic Liver Disease and Cirrhosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unintentional Injuries• Suicide• Cancer• Chronic Liver Disease and Cirrhosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Suicide• Unintentional Injuries• Chronic Liver Disease and Cirrhosis• Cancer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unintentional Injuries• Heart Disease

Bui, Allison. Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Internal Analysis: Years of Potential Life Lost (YPLL) measures for the state (and counties) for 2018-2020. Analysis for Summit Community Care Clinic

Imperfect Performance of Paycheck Protection Program



David Autor

NPR affiliate [WBUR in Boston recorded a story](#) by Lydia DePillis a reporter at ProPublica for OnPoint. It featured an interview with David Autor, professor of Economics at MIT who published a working paper tracing the Paycheck Protection Program funding.

In it, Autor explains why only about 1/4 of the \$800 billion program went to protecting paychecks, including how the U.S. was much less targeted in this and other recovery funding than similar European countries because of its antiquated administrative systems.

The interviewer asks, "PPP was an inefficient and expensive success. One that helped some workers, but also helped the richest Americans. How could the system be fixed?" Though most of us consider the initial wave of COVID and the shutdowns to be

a once in a lifetime "black swan" event, Autor argues that while the scale of the recovery program may have been unique, that studying what parts of the program were effective and which were not should be useful in structuring future recovery programs.

The piece also interviews business owners who share that the program kept them afloat during the pandemic. What the federal government did during the pandemic in rapidly deploying PPP and other funding was one of the most impactful actions ever taken by the federal government.

The bottom line of the program:

Had we not spent the past 50 years trying to dismantle and make the administrative state less effective, it would have gone much more smoothly.

Save The Date

Save the Date!
NWCCOG Regional Economic Summit
Thursday, May 5 at the Silverthorne Pavilion
8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
More details to come!

Next Council Meeting - Thursday, March 24, 2022

Full Council Meeting, EDD Board Meeting

Location: Zoom Conference Call, On-site location TBD

Time: Council 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM - EDD 12:30 PM - 2:30 PM

Primary Agenda Items: Approval of final 2021 financials; program overviews; Member Handbook; approve January minutes