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OPINION

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Oklahoma recognizes value of the wage earner

It has been 130 years since the first Labor Day holiday was celebrated in 1882, in New York City. Gains made over the last 130 years by working men and women have resulted in one of the most prosperous and advanced economies known in world history. This success lies with our unique place in world history, that of American exceptionalism.

At the dawn of the 21st century, Labor Day should be more than a celebration of past gains.

Through our populist's roots, Oklahoma recognizes the intricate value of the wage earner through our state motto, Labor conquers all. At the time of statehood half of all farms were run under a sharecropper's agreement. Yet, today the sharecropper is just a footnote on

MARK COSTELLO

the pages of Oklahoma history.

As Labor Commissioner, my job description calls upon me to advance the economic well-being of Oklahoma wage earners. There is no better way to advance economic prosperity for wage earners than to recognize and advance entrepreneurial excellence in Oklahoma.

We are a state rich with examples of entrepreneurial excellence.

Three such entrepreneurial examples are Harold Hamm, Larry



Nichols, and Ed Malzahn. Each with their individual story of the challenges they faced in order to feed their own family and create jobs that allow for many other Oklahomans to feed their families.

• Harold Hamm founded Continental Oil. Hamm is the son of a sharecropper and the youngest of 13 children. Like many other successful Oklahomans, he started work young, making a dollar an hour while in high school. By age 26 he drilled his first wildcat well. Today, Continental Oil employs nearly 700 people in ten states.

• Larry Nichols co-founded Devon Energy Corporation with his father James Nichols in 1971. Devon started with four and one-half employ-

ees. Today, Devon is ranked among Fortune's 500 largest corporations in America, and listed as 100 Best Companies to Work For.

• Ed Malzahn grew The Charles Machine Works, Inc., founded by his German immigrant father, into one of the most successful line of underground construction equipment companies in the world. This Perry based company is known for its multiple generations of families who make their career with Ditch Witch.

Hamm, Nichols, and Malzahn are not alone. They are joined by hundreds, if not thousands, of small and large business innovators who have a vision of a better day and possess the drive and willingness to

do the hard work to create more and better paying jobs for their fellow Oklahomans. Tens of thousands of Oklahoma families are fed each day by the labor they put forth in jobs created by entrepreneurs.

We Oklahomans are descendants of land run pioneers, oil field wildcatters, sharecroppers, and entrepreneurs; hardworking men and women who complement each other's contributions to create the social and economic fabric of our great state. On this Labor Day, Oklahoma uniquely recognizes the complimentary contributions of both labor and the entrepreneur who creates jobs.

Mark Costello is Oklahoma's Labor Commissioner.