

Bryan Jackson, Owner, Route 66 Meat Processing  
Statement for Hearing on the State of the American Economy  
House Committee on Ways and Means  
Yukon, Oklahoma  
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Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Neal, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written statement for your consideration. It's an honor for me to have the opportunity to share my thoughts with you on the state of the American economy.

We own and operate a meat processing facility that is USDA inspected in Western Oklahoma. Most processing plants are custom, where inspection is unnecessary because the meat is only processed for the owner of the animal the meat is labeled "NOT FOR SALE". Business that operate under this exemption are inspected less frequently than operations under continuous inspection.

We are one of only a handful of processing plants in the state with the licensing to harvest and process meat that can be sold or distributed anywhere in the county in any country when it leaves our facility. We are essentially viewed by USDA as being on-par with the large packers, albeit at a much smaller scale.

The first area I'd like to cover is **Labor**. We have been in business for almost two years. Since we started initial construction during the COVID pandemic in 2020, we struggled not only to find contract labor for the various parts of construction, but also full-time employees.

Today we are facing an increasingly-challenging work environment where employees may or may not show up to work. As a result, our ability to complete the work we commit to as a service company is made more difficult. Gone are the days where you could just fire an employee for substandard performance. Today, we find ourselves counseling and coaxing workers into just showing up to work.

Mental health issues are a major concern, much of it stemming from an onslaught of constant exposure and reliance on social media has removed the grit from our work culture. The resulting work ethic has slowly diminished over the last twenty years.

There is a famous quote by Michael Hopf:

**HARD TIMES create strong people**

**STRONG PEOPLE create good times**

**GOOD TIMES create weak people**

**WEAK PEOPLE create hard times**

People used to be thankful for a job. I for one have been humbled on more than one occasion by corporate layoffs, and then later experiencing the real challenges of starting a business. To be as resilient as the generations before us we need to toughen up and get to work. Employers must adapt to the current work environment or risk having to closeup shop. Last year we sent out almost four times more W-2's than the number of employees we currently have on staff.

We must find new ways to incentive folks to show up to work. The model our business has had since the beginning has been not just to retain the best employees, but help them grow – physically, mentally and emotionally. Our business is inherently very labor intensive. One person described it well as essentially being a disassembly plant.

It's not enough anymore to just provide a paycheck. Finding ways to be more flexible with employee work schedules and assist in them having the ability to maintain a work-life balance is key. To have the best employees you have to have high standards but also take care of them. People do not care what you know until they know that you care. We as a nation must care for our people while holding each other to high standards.

The second area to cover is **Inflation**. We see firsthand how out of control costs have gotten in the last several years. We service quite a few SNAP/EBT customers, and they are being faced with a difficult decision of how to manage what they have as their purchasing power continues to decline.

The beef industry as a whole is in a tough spot. There is not much profitability for a rancher because the cost of fertilizer and feed is too high. My brother-in-law is a 5<sup>th</sup> generation rancher who supplies much of our beef that we retail and wholesale, so we are in a unique spot not only to provide locally raised, locally processed meat, but we also realize the impact of higher beef costs.

There are several things we can do to compete with the lower quality, imported beef. If we made it a requirement to include "Country of Origin" on the meat, it would raise consumer awareness on what people are buying.

Investing in increased automation bring down costs for processors by increasing capacity with better trained, more technically-minded employees. As a small meat processor we do more of the labor by hand, whereas large packers have the scalability of assembly lines to maintain a monopoly on output. We would be more profitable if we could process at a lower cost.

In conclusion, we face many challenges as a nation but nothing that we cannot overcome by working together. Thank you all for your consideration of my statement and for your service to our Great Nation.

Respectfully,

Bryan Jackson