

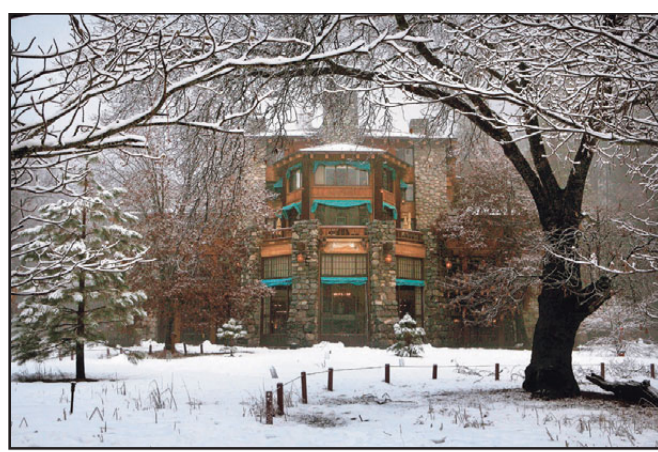
# Must try adventures at Yosemite National Park

TRAVEL

## 15 best nonfiction books of 2021

BOOKS

Evie Johnson, 80, bow hunting big game for some 38 years  
NORTHLAND OUTDOORS



# POSTBULLETIN

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## 5 THINGS TO CATCH

### 1. Give me some comfort

We're soon flipping the calendar to a brand new year. Food writer Holly Ebel says

food trends come and go, and this may be the time to tuck into some dishes from the past. On Tuesday, we have the scoop on retro foods that are trending.

### 2. Big wheelers keep on moving

The trucking industry plays a key role in the supply chain — moving goods from factory to stores or from the farm to our tables. On Saturday, we take a closer look at the industry, from drivers and owners to lawmakers and instructors.



### 3. Check your swing

In a few days, golf pro David Richardson is retiring after serving 19 years of his 40-year career on Rochester courses. Is there more golf in his future? We talk with him about that and more on Wednesday.

### 4. The Sports Person of the Year is...

We'll tell you on New Year's Day. The PB sports staff started with a list of close to a dozen names. From the wrestling mat to the volleyball and basketball courts to hockey rinks, we had many great possibilities. Finally, we settled on one. That person's story will be published on Saturday.

### 5. Tournament Time

No, it's not time for playoffs just yet. But it is time for holiday tournaments. We'll have previews and full coverage of the Rotary boys and girls basketball tournaments, and the Kiwanis Festival hockey tournament this week at PostBulletin.com/Sports and in the PB print editions.

## Uncertainties remain for Rochester Public Schools ahead of federal vaccine mandate

BY JORDAN SHEARER  
Post Bulletin

As the federal vaccine mandate draws near for large employers, the leadership of Rochester Public Schools is still uncertain how aspects of the requirement will apply locally.

The mandate would require organizations with 100 or more employees to require their staff to be vaccinated. RPS has more than 2,700 employees.

Interim Superintendent Kent Pekel said the district will most likely not bring a

policy proposal to the School Board before Jan. 18. The federal mandate, he said, will be administered on the state level by the Department of Labor and Industry, which has not yet made clear how local organizations will have to implement the mandate.

"They'll be determining regulations for Minnesota," Pekel said. "We don't have their regulations and their interpretation of it... For us to try to put together a policy when we don't have that guidance I think is asking for a bad policy."

For example, it's unknown

how the order would impact the district's relationship with drivers of its bus contractor, First Student. It's also uncertain whether the District would be expected to pay for testing or if that would fall to the individual. Pekel said they also need clarification about how many doses of the vaccine qualifies a person as being fully vaccinated, according to the mandate.

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's website, it won't issue citations for noncompliance

before Jan. 10. and it won't issue citations for noncompliance with standard's testing requirements before Feb. 9. OSHA clarified those are the deadlines "so long as an employer is exercising reasonable, good faith efforts to come into compliance."

Pekel said the district may start asking for voluntary disclosure of staff members' vaccination status ahead of time so that it can have all the data ready once the deadline goes into effect.

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Kari Schaaf / Contributed

Kari Schaaf is pictured here with husband, Danny, and their son, Blixen, near the Missouri River in Bismarck in early fall 2021. The Schaafs will temporarily relocate to Seattle in January for Kari's first assignment as a travel nurse. Kari says she's always wanted to see more of the country and the high wages being paid to travel nurses, due to COVID, made that possible.

## The Great American Walk-off

### Why US workers are leaving in droves

**EDITORS NOTE:** It's called "The Great Resignation," a seismic upheaval in the workforce that is reshaping today's economy. This week, Forum Communication Co. reporters will look at The Great Resignation's profound effects on workers and businesses across the region in our multi-part series, "Help Wanted."

BY TAMMY SWIFT  
The Forum

In western North Dakota, a young RN who always longed to see the world decides to leave a steady job in Bismarck, pack up her young family and take a \$90-an-hour position as a travel nurse.

A Fargo teacher, frustrated with trying to connect with students via remote learning, decides to change careers completely and pursue a nursing career.

Down in Arizona, a North Dakota snowbird who has worked in marketing for over 45 years notices that her client load keeps getting lighter — and decides she doesn't mind. She'd rather play pickleball and ease into retirement.

These are just a few of the work stories around the COVID-19 pandemic. The virus has been like a giant boot kicking over an anthill — and we are the ants, running frantically, seeking some sense of order and wondering if the world around us will ever look the same.

It's little wonder, then, that today's workscape looks so new and strange. "Help wanted" signs are everywhere, with restaurants and stores cutting hours due to lack of staff. Employment specialists complain that people won't take a job unless it pays at least \$15 an hour. Since April, workers have been voluntarily leaving their jobs at an unprecedented rate of 4 million people — that's more people than the populations of the Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington metro area — per month.

Jill Berg, CEO of Spherion Staffing, which has offices in North Dakota and Minnesota, says this hemorrhage of employees, commonly called The Great Resignation, is

unprecedented.

"What we have to do is figure out how we are going to flip that switch and turn that Great Resignation into the Great Retention, because if we don't, we will not be able to survive as a country," Berg said during a Concordia College webinar titled "The Big Quit" in November.

So what's the problem? Have American workers grown too entitled? Or is this real culprit a profit-focused corporate culture which left too many employees feeling overlooked, undervalued and expendable?

The answer likely lies somewhere in between. It seems COVID triggered more than a Great Resignation; it also inspired a Great Reckoning. The virus has been a double-edged sword — taking lives, disrupting the economy and spreading fear on one hand, yet stopping the world for long enough that people dared to ask themselves existential questions they may have never asked otherwise.

"People are really seeing things through a different

filter here," says Berg. "They're seeing what's important in my life? Is my health important? Is my family important? Is my safety important? What are those things? And it may not be the 12-hour workday or the eight-hour workday."

In the case of Kari Schaaf, the labor-and-delivery RN who opted to become a travel nurse, the lure of \$90-an-hour wages and the chance to explore different parts of the country were too powerful to resist. Schaaf has wanted to travel the world since she was young, even persuading husband, Danny, to spend their honeymoon in Thailand. The adventure of living elsewhere seemed especially enticing after two years of shrouding herself in masks, gloves and gowns; watching her co-workers divide into pro- and anti-vax camps and seeing unvaccinated moms get deathly ill from the virus.

Schaaf says she'll miss her family in North Dakota and her workplace. But she's

See WORKERS, Page 2

# Business experts: Reasons for quitting work range from poor pay to feeling undervalued

BY TAMMY SWIFT  
The Forum

Business Insider magazine interviewed numerous employment experts to identify the complex interplay of factors linked to worker shortages:

- 1. Child care issues.** We are in a child care crisis. According to a McKinsey & Co. study, 45 percent of workers who quit their jobs cited a need to take care of family as a major factor in their decision. As child care centers struggle to fill staffing needs, many have to offer better wages to compete — thus driving up child care costs. In response, some two-income households may find it cheaper for one parent to say home and care for the kids.
- 2. A need to feel valued:** While many businesses have assumed more money is the

answer, an international study by McKinsey & Co., found that it's even more important for workers to feel like their employers value them and that their work has meaning.

**3. An expanding "gig" economy:** The US has seen dramatic growth in self-employed, unincorporated workers in the last year, as aspiring entrepreneurs jump in to provide contract work which used to be done by full-time employees.

**4. Outdated biases in choosing workers:** The US has about 40 million STARS — folks who don't have college degrees but are "Skilled Through Alternative Routes." Unfortunately, they may never even get the first interview because of educational requirements. Employers need to rule out old biases and assumptions to fill their labor gaps, whether that

means tapping into the country's 20 million former felons — who typically encounter major obstacles finding work — or hiring more workers with disabilities, according to the Insider.

**5. Fewer immigrants:** Over the last five years, immigration restrictions have reduced the number of workers who typically fill jobs in manufacturing and construction.

"There are about 1.2 million adult foreign workers or work-eligible immigrants who are just not here because of the restrictions that have been imposed during the pandemic," David Bier from Cato Institute told NPR in October. "That's about a quarter of the increase in job openings."

**6. A need for liveable wages.** Fry says low wages meant people had to work several different jobs, which kept them

from "upskilling" — either by going to school or earning a certification — as a way to improve life for them and their family. Better pay makes it easier to work just one job and have time to gain new skills.

**7. Lack of flexibility.** Once people sampled the freedom of remote work, many weren't anxious to return to cubicle culture and hovering bosses.

**8. Mismatches between workers and jobs.** Just because there are open jobs doesn't mean the candidate pool matches them. Programs like Minnesota's "Good Jobs Now," are meant to connect job hunters to jobs, while also providing employment counselors, aptitude tests and other tools to help jobseekers gain new skills if they wish to switch vocations.

**9. A growing 'anti-work' mentality:** An "anti-work" community has arisen on platforms

like Reddit, where over a million users gather to share stories of narcissistic bosses and soul-killing conditions. Their version of the American Dream is based on the type of work that works for all humans vs. the notion that humans need to be molded to fit a single template to fit a job.

**10. Health concerns and vaccine hesitancy linger** as the pandemic continues. We're still very much in a pandemic and health concerns may stick around. S&P global economists said in a note that 1.4 million workers may not return until "pandemic-related issues are resolved."

And with the Omicron strain already spreading, the virus is still very much with us.

Tammy Swift is a business writer/columnist at The Forum. She can be reached at [tswift@forumcomm.com](mailto:tswift@forumcomm.com).

## Mandate

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The law would only apply to staff members of the school district and not students.

As of September, 88% of the district's employees had been vaccinated against COVID-19. With large data sets, though, there has to be a match between the data that the district has and the database they are comparing the information against.

At the time, there was only a 63% match rate of staff members. Essentially, that means that 88% of the 63% from the positive match rate were confirmed to be vaccinated. The district was using the Minnesota Immunization Information Connection (MIIC) for its vaccine information.

Pekel said the district expects to upgrade its vaccination information in January.

The mandate has faced legal challenges. On Friday, however, the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned a stay that had been implemented over the mandate. The mandate is facing further legal challenges and has been appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Pekel said the mandate could cause some staff issues for the district. "Is it likely to create some labor pressures at a time when we're already challenged with that?" Pekel said. "It's easy to see that."

Contact education reporter Jordan Shearer at [jshearer@postbulletin.com](mailto:jshearer@postbulletin.com).

## Workers

From page 1

excited about her new job, which starts with a 13-week assignment in Seattle. She doesn't think this job could have happened without the conditions created by the pandemic. "I'm not sure it would have been possible to support the entire family prior to COVID, as wages skyrocketed for travel nurses because of it," she says.

### WORKFORCE SHORTAGE ISN'T NEW PHENOMENON

North Dakota and Minnesota — known for sturdy work ethics — show some of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. North Dakota has the 13th lowest unemployment rate in the U.S. with a seasonally adjusted rate of 3.3%, while Minnesota trails closely at just 3.5 percent, according to November numbers from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"There's nobody milking that supposed gravy train," says Carey Fry, director of North Dakota Job Service's Workforce Development Center in Fargo, in response to criticisms that federal stimulus payments and child care tax credits have turned Americans into freeloaders. "It's not happening."

Studies suggest people are leaving for jobs with higher pay, more flexibility or a healthier work culture. "It's not just quitting for the sake of quitting, it's quitting to find better employment," Gregory Daco, the chief US economist at Oxford Economics, told the New York Times.



Troy Becker / The Forum

**US workers, burnt out by the stress of the past two years and wondering if their lives are about more than work, are voluntarily walking away from jobs at an unprecedented rate of 4 million people per month.**

Fry also points out that the pandemic only created the tipping point for a workforce that's been shrinking for years.

People are really seeing things through a different filter here. They're seeing what's important in my life? Is my health important? Is my family important? Is my safety important? What are those things? And it may not be the 12-hour workday or the eight-hour workday.

On the one hand, the law of supply-and-demand has given American workers a new surge of bargaining power. Employers must reach deeper into their pockets to pay workers, who may have once juggled several minimum-wage jobs to pay rent but now can find positions that start at \$15.

Joyce Norals, vice president and chief human resource officer at Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota, also spoke at the Concordia webinar on

"The Big Quit." Norals believes that one positive development from the labor shortage is that it has forced the system to pay a better wage to the working poor.

"The benefit of it was it helped organization and public policy around helping set the minimum wage as a livable wage," she says.

On the other hand, many smaller businesses cannot afford those wages. And the workers who suffer most are those jammed in the middle — the reliable stalwarts who always show up, as well as the middle managers who are caught between meeting organizational goals while picking up the slack left by skeletal staffing.

### CAUSES RANGE FROM DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS TO PERSONAL EPIPHANIES

This unprecedented labor shortage has everyone scrambling to find the cause.

Some of it represents a simple demographic

shift: Many older workers retired early when COVID hit. At the same time, families are smaller, which means fewer young workers are entering the workforce, Fry says.

And of that smaller demographic, fewer high school and college-age students — who traditionally filled many restaurant and hospitality jobs — are opting to enter the job market these days.

Young people seem to have more academic pressure and extracurricular choices, or their parents no longer expect them to get a job, Fry says. More college students also are studying remotely from other communities.

And once those young people graduate from North Dakota colleges, it can be an uphill battle to keep them here. Many graduates flock to larger cities, with the

promise of higher wages and more social and entertainment options.

"We are competing with every state in this country for workers. What is it that's going to make them want to come to North Dakota or to Fargo-Moorhead and take a job here?" Fry says.

Other reasons commonly cited for workers exiting are trouble securing reliable child care, vaccine hesitancy, pandemic-related safety fears and the trend of workers quitting to work for themselves.

But for some, it's an internal drive to feel valued and like they're in the right job. The term, "epiphany quitters," has been coined for those who made drastic career shifts amid COVID.

Fry's own daughter experienced this after months of struggling to engage students while teaching high school English remotely. After listening to her cousin speak enthusiastically about her nursing degree, Fry's daughter informed her mom she would finish out the year teaching, but she was also taking the prerequisite classes to get into the accelerated bachelor's in nursing program through Concordia College.

"She told me, 'I just re-evaluated what I wanted to do, and I think this is really what I want and so I'm doing it,'" Fry says.

Tammy Swift is a business reporter/columnist at The Forum. She can be reached at [tswift@forumcomm.com](mailto:tswift@forumcomm.com).

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