

CBS Mornings Plus

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9:16:40 a.m. [TEASE]

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[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Coming Up; Reexamining “The American Dream”]

KELLY O’GRADY: Coming up in today’s high-priced world, what does the American Dream even mean anymore? And can we still achieve it?

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5 minutes and 25 seconds

ED O’KEEFE: Most of us have an idea of what the American dream looks like, whether it’s owning a house with a white crooked fence, turning an idea into a successful business, or giving your children a better life than you had. By the way, if reaching that dream has become a bit of a nightmare, you’re not alone. In a powerful letter published by the Daily Yonder titled, “Living in the Shadow of the American Dream,” a self-described Virginia factory worker, farmer, and father of two reflects on the financial struggles facing his working-class family. In it, he writes, “I’m not ashamed of our life. It’s honest work and it’s full of love. However, I am ashamed that in a country as wealthy as ours, people like us are left out in the cold.” “You shouldn’t be able to carry \$100 worth of groceries in two hands, but these days you can, and that’s not just wrong, it’s dangerous. I’m ready to ask one simple thing. Who is this country really for?” “So, if you’re in power, hear me. We are not okay. We are drowning quietly.” Andrew Tait, who wrote that letter, joins us now from Virginia. Andrew, good morning and thank you for being with us. Give us a better sense of your own personal situation at home and what compelled you to write this essay.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: By the Way; Reexamining “The American Dream”]

ANDREW TAIT: Good morning. Thank you for having me. Honestly, not really too sure what compelled me. I just know that doing nothing felt worse.

O’KEEFE: And do you think at all right now the American dream is achievable for middle-class, working-class people like yourself?

TAIT: I don’t know. Honestly, we just try every day. It’s a struggle. But when you think about the American dream, you think about, you know, what does it mean to anybody? You know, clean water, safe schools, you know, a living wage. I feel like people are trying for it. People want it. But I don’t know if it’s something that’s in reach.

O’GRADY: And Andrew, I want to quote a line from your letter. You said that “when the so-called big beautiful bill passed, it was marketed as a win for working Americans. From where I stand, it looks like the opposite.” Now, a lot of people would argue that extending the tax cuts,

increasing the child tax credits, provisions for more take home pay. Now, if you rely on tips, would help those working Americans. So, what specifically do you take issue with? Do you think doesn't help those working Americans?

TAIT: Well, for me, I think, you know, cutting of medical assistance and food assistance for the people who need it most is very important. Also, I think that some of those provisions are temporary, that are going to be a relief for working class, while the wealthy one percent have tax cuts that are now permanent.

O'KEEFE: You know, that bill was written by, passed by a bunch of politicians, obviously. What do you think those in elected office are missing or forgetting when they're thinking about the needs of the American people?

TAIT: That's just it. I don't know that they are thinking of the needs of the American people. I think they're too busy fighting with each other, Democrat and Republican both. I think that for a long time, every time I voted, it's — who do I hate the least? And I think that's wrong. I think we should find someone who is inspiring, someone who, you know, treats the position like it is. Like, it's, you're a public servant. You need to serve your people.

O'KEEFE: You've obviously spent some time thinking about this. Is there anyone out there right now who you think is doing it right? In either party?

TAIT: I just think we need unity. I think we need less division. I think that, you know, we could really just need to listen to each other more.

O'GRADY: I mean, listening to you say, who do I hate the least? I think that does resonate. You and I have both covered a lot of issues.

O'KEEFE: And we hear a lot of that from voters.

O'GRADY: We do hear a lot of that. I'm curious, your article, you present the question, who is this country really for? Now that a bit of time has passed since you've published this, you've spoken to people in their reaction. I mean, what are you hearing? Do you think it resonates with them?

TAIT: Honestly, it's a little overwhelming. I was not expecting the feedback that I received. You know, I sent it to a few local papers, friends and family. But it's just been an outpour of support. I've got letters from strangers. I've got, you know, interview requests. I mean, here I'm on *CBS Mornings*. Definitely not something someone like me does. But I think maybe it, you know, resonated with folks because I'm not alone. We're not alone. You know, I don't think that I'm special or different in any way. I think it's all of us collectively are struggling and hurting. I think that, you know, as we live in this country, you know, we talk about the rat race and trying to get ahead, trying to get to the next promotion, trying to get to the next level. But then they keep moving the goalpost. You know, what I -- what I make now won't matter in 15 years, in 20 years. And it seems to be trending that way that the more you make, the more that you have to pay.

O'GRADY: Yeah, that constant search for the American dream. I think that does strike a chord with folks. Andrew Tait, thank you for joining us today.

TAIT: Thank you so much.

O'GRADY: That was today's By the Way.