

Raising the minimum wage is a central part of the civil rights agenda to improve the economic condition of the working poor. I am proud that our legislation has the strong support of this renowned organization, and I ask unanimous consent that Hugh Price's column be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the column was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

A DECENT INCOME FOR LOW-WAGE WORKERS

(By Hugh B. Price)

With all the hurrahs over the astonishing current performance of the American economy—the so-called Long Boom—it's easy to forget that portion of the nation's workforce which has hardly shared in the general prosperity: the 12 million Americans who wages range from the current minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour up to \$6.14 an hour.

That sum, earned by people who work in such low-skill positions as fast-food worker and teacher's aide, adds up to a paltry annual income indeed. The average American worker's hourly wage is \$12.64 an hour. But an individual working at the minimum wage for 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, earns only \$10,712 annually—an income that is \$2,600 below the federal government's poverty line for a family of three.

That fact, coupled with recent cuts in welfare and Food Stamps programs, has driven increasing numbers of the working poor to emergency food banks and pantries: A 1996 U.S. Conference of Mayors survey found that 38 percent of those seeking emergency food aid hold jobs, up from 23 percent in 1994; and more and more private charities are saying they can't meet the greater demand on their resources.

We must help Americans who work but often endure great privation move closer to a decent, livable wage. We can do that by supporting legislation in Congress raising the minimum wage to a threshold of \$6.15 an hour. Senator Ted Kennedy (D.-Mass.) will try to bring the measure, which has President Clinton's backing, before the Senate after Memorial Day Congressional recess. Representative David Bonior (D.-Mich.) will lead the effort for it in the House. The proposed law would raise the minimum wage by 50 cents each year for 1999 and 2000.

We should raise the minimum wage because it's only fair: hard work deserves just compensation at the bottom as well as the top of the salary ladder.

We know from the experience of the 90-cents minimum-wage hike President Clinton signed into law in 1996 that minimum-wage increases benefit the people who need it most—hardworking adults in low-income families. Based on federal labor department statistics, the Economic Policy Institute, a Washington think tank, found that nearly 60 percent of the gains from that minimum wage hike has gone to workers in the bottom 40 percent of the income ladder. Raising the minimum wage by \$1 will help insure that parents who work hard and play by the rules, and who utilize the Earned Income Tax Credit, can bring up their children out of poverty.

Contrary to a widespread view, federal statistics show that most workers earning the minimum wage are adults, not teenagers. Half of them work full time, and another third work at least 20 hours a week. Sixty percent of those earning the minimum wage are women; 15 percent are African-American, and 14 percent are Hispanic.

Our recent experience has shown that raising the minimum wage in an era of strong and balanced economic expansion won't undermine job growth. The hike President Clinton signed into law in August 1996 increased

the wages of 10 million workers. Since then, the economy has created new jobs at the very rapid pace of 250,000 per month, inflation has declined from 2.9 percent to 1.6 percent, and the unemployment rate has fallen to 4.6 percent—its lowest level in nearly 25 years.

Some have expressed concern that raising the minimum wage will make it even harder than it routinely is for young black males to find work. Of course, the unemployment rate of black males 16 to 19 years of age remains dangerously high: for 1997 it was 36.5 percent. But the minimum wage itself is hardly a significant cause of this decades-old problem, as we've noted before. Keeping the wages of all low-income workers at subsistence levels will likely only exacerbate the employment problems of young black males—and of the communities they live in.

Increasing the minimum wage now would restore its real value to the level it last held in 1981, before the inflation of the 1980s drove it down. We further recommend that Congress index the minimum wage to inflation starting in the year 2001 to prevent a further erosion of its value. Low-wage workers should be treated no differently than other, higher-income workers who annually receive at least cost-of-living increases in their salaries. With our economy in such glowing health, there could be no better time to raise the minimum wage. As President Clinton urged in his State of the Union Address: "In an economy that honors opportunity, all Americans must be able to reap the rewards of prosperity. Because these times are good, we can afford to take one simple, sensible step to help millions of workers struggling to provide for their families: We should raise the minimum wage."

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Tuesday, May 12, 1998, the federal debt stood at \$5,491,841,497,777.68 (Five trillion, four hundred ninety-one billion, eight hundred forty-one million, four hundred ninety-seven thousand, seven hundred seventy-seven dollars and sixty-eight cents).

One year ago, May 12, 1997, the federal debt stood at \$5,334,445,000,000 (Five trillion, three hundred thirty-four billion, four hundred forty-five million).

Five years ago, May 12, 1993, the federal debt stood at \$4,245,570,000,000 (Four trillion, two hundred forty-five billion, five hundred seventy million).

Ten years ago, May 12, 1988, the federal debt stood at \$2,510,382,000,000 (Two trillion, five hundred ten billion, three hundred eighty-two million).

Fifteen years ago, May 12, 1983, the federal debt stood at \$1,258,875,000,000 (One trillion, two hundred fifty-eight billion, eight hundred seventy-five million) which reflects a debt increase of more than \$4 trillion—\$4,232,966,497,777.68 (Four trillion, two hundred thirty-two billion, nine hundred sixty-six million, four hundred ninety-seven thousand, seven hundred seventy-seven dollars and sixty-eight cents) during the past 15 years.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I believe that I have reserved 15 minutes, up to 2 o'clock, to speak. I ask unanimous consent that I be able to use this

20 minutes, up to 2, to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, there are two topics that I would like to cover. I have been trying to get to the floor for 2 days. I will not give either one of them the justice they deserve, but I shall do my best.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is recognized.

THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, as a long-time supporter of Israel and her security, and as a fierce advocate of the Middle East peace process, I commend President Clinton, Secretary Albright, Ambassador Ross, and Assistant Secretary Indyk for their ongoing efforts to preserve and even reinvigorate the stalled peace process. As a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, as a Jewish Senator, as someone who loves Israel, I have followed this latest round of negotiations carefully. I care fiercely about what happens. And I thank the administration for staying engaged and for making a commitment to a peace process that Prime Minister Rabin gave his life for. I will never forget my visit to Israel for his funeral service. It was so moving to hear his granddaughter speak about him. I really hope and pray that we will have a peaceful resolution in the Middle East. I think it will be important for the Israeli children and the Palestinian children, and the children of other Middle Eastern countries as well.

I have watched with growing concern, over the past several weeks, as some critics of the administration's policy toward Israel here in the Congress have launched fierce partisan attacks on the policy. Speaker GINGRICH last week was even quoted as saying, in a press conference in which he criticized the administration's recent handling of the peace process, "America's strong-arm tactics would send a clear signal to the supporters of terrorism that their murderous actions are an effective tool in forcing concessions from Israel."

Mr. President, I think that is a demagogic accusation leveled at the President. I believe that the administration is trying to do the right thing. I point out that public opinion polls show that the majority of the people in our country believe that the administration is doing the right thing by continuing to put proposals out there, by trying to get this peace process going.

The administration has presented no ultimatums. It cannot force either party to do what it has no intention of doing. But I think this is courageous on the part of the administration. Quite often I am critical of this President, but I believe they are doing the right thing. The majority of the people