

some on the other side have been saying. There is a lot involved here. We ought to be reducing taxes, not increasing minimum wages.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, how much time do I have remaining?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts has 4 minutes.

Mr. KENNEDY. I yield 3 minutes.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I have not heard my colleague from Utah respond to this. I haven't heard one colleague on the other side of the aisle respond to the data or to the facts. I have heard them try to hide behind the argument that raising the minimum wage was going to lead to a loss of jobs. Since increasing the minimum wage in the prior year, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 517,000 new jobs. Sometimes we do not want to know what we do not want to know. I have not heard any refutation of that at all.

So my question is, Why in the world would we not value work and give dignity to work by raising the minimum wage, which is so important to women in the workplace, so important to children, so important to families?

Then my colleague from Utah moves on to another argument concerning child care. In all due respect, that is what is so sad about this debate. If we really wanted to do our best by families and value families, we would be raising the minimum wage, we would be investing in affordable child care—which this Republican-led Senate will not do. We would have universal health care coverage, which this Republican-led Senate will not do. In child care, I hope the tradeoff is not to say that we are not going to be able to provide good child care for children unless we continue to devalue the work of men and women in child care. Many of them barely make minimum wage or barely above it. That is why we have a 40-percent turnover every year. This is not acceptable.

We can raise the minimum wage, which is important for women, important for these working families, important for children, important for young people who are trying to work their way through school. We can invest in the health and skills and intellect and character by investing in affordable child care. We can invest in health care. This Republican-led Senate has done none of these things.

In all due respect, in all due respect, the reason that 75 or 80 percent of the people in the country believe we should raise the minimum wage is because they have some sense of fairness and justice. We raised our salaries by \$30,000 just a few years ago. We gave ourselves a cost-of-living increase that amounts to a \$1.50 increase per hour, we make \$130,000-plus and say we need to make that. And yet, we will not raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.15 over a 2-year period so people who work hard will not be poor in America and their children will not be poor? This is really outrageous.

I hope we get a majority vote.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I believe I have some time?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts has 1 minute 20 seconds.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, just again to underline the excellent point my friend from Iowa made, according to the U.S. Conference of Mayors study, in 1997 requests for emergency food aid increased 86 percent in the cities served—these are cities with Republican and Democratic mayors. Mr. President, 67 percent of the cities cited low-paying jobs as one of the main causes of hunger. Low-paying jobs are the most frequently cited causes of hunger. Nearly half of those relying on emergency food aid do so because their earnings are too low. In 1997, in Jeffersonville, IN, one-fourth of the families receiving emergency shelter were earning less than \$6 an hour.

This is about fairness to teachers' aides, to child care workers. It is a basic and fundamental issue with regard to health care workers as well. We are either going to respect our fellow citizens and give them this modest increase in the minimum wage, or we are not going to meet our responsibilities.

Mr. President, has the time expired?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time remaining is 10 seconds.

Mr. HARKIN. If the Senator will yield me the 10 seconds—I have 10 seconds, Mr. President—there is a lot of talk in this town these days about morality and immorality. This has to do with morality. This has to do with what is moral in this society and to stick up for people who are low-income and are going hungry.

#### RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Debate on this issue has expired. The hour of 12:30 having arrived, the Senate will be in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, at 12:31 p.m., the Senate recessed until 2:15 p.m.; whereupon, the Senate reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. COATS).

Mr. SARBANES. Mr. President, I rise in strong support of Senator KENNEDY's amendment to raise the Federal minimum wage. I am proud to be an original co-sponsor of the legislation—upon which this amendment is based—to raise the minimum wage 50 cents a year over the next two years bringing it to \$6.15 per hour by the year 2000.

For more than half a century, Congress has acted to guarantee minimum standards of decency for working Americans. The object of a Federal minimum wage is to make work pay well enough to keep families out of poverty and off Government assistance. Any individual who works hard and plays by the rules should be assured a living standard for his or her family that can keep them out of poverty.

If nothing is done before the year 2000, the real value of the minimum

wage will be just \$4.82 in 1997 dollars—about what it was before Congress last acted to increase the minimum wage in 1996. The increase being proposed today would bring the purchasing power of the minimum wage to \$5.76. Now, no one asserts that raising the minimum wage will correct every economic injustice, but it will certainly make a significant difference to those on the low end of the economic scale. We have the opportunity to enact what is in my view a modest increase to help curb the erosion of the value of the minimum wage in terms of real dollars, and it is an opportunity which we should not let pass us by.

Currently, full-time minimum wage worker earns just \$10,712—\$2,600 below the poverty level for a family of three. A dollar increase in the minimum wage would provide a minimum wage worker with an additional \$2,080 in income per year, helping to bring that family of three closer to the most basic standard of living. This extra income will help a family pay their bills and quite possibly even allow them to afford something above and beyond the bare essentials.

According to the Department of Labor, 74 percent of workers who will benefit from an increase in the minimum wage are adults, 50 percent work full time, 60 percent are women and 40 percent are the sole breadwinners in their families. Mr. President, these are not the part-time workers and suburban teenagers many opponents of the minimum wage increase would have you believe.

After 30 years of spiralling deficits we are on the verge of balancing the budget for the first time in 30 years - 4 years ahead of schedule. Today, the budget is virtually balanced, unemployment is at a 25-year low, and inflation is at a 30-year low. However, despite this period of economic prosperity, the disparity between the very rich in this country and the very poor continues to grow. According to the Economic Policy Institute, projections for 1997 indicate that the share of the wealth held by the top 1 percent of households grew by almost 2 percent since 1989. Over that same period, the share of the wealth held by families in the middle fifth of the population fell by half a percent. In light of these estimates, consider that the Department of Labor predicts that 57 percent of the gains from an increase in the minimum wage will go to families in the bottom 40 percent of the income scale.

It is both reasonable and responsible for Congress to enact measures which provide a standard that allows decent, hard-working Americans a floor upon which they can stand. We did it back in 1996 when we approved, by a bipartisan vote of 74-24, a 90 cent increase in the minimum wage bringing it to its current level of \$5.15 per hour, and it is appropriate to do it here again. With the economy strong, we have a responsibility to reinforce this basic economic floor for millions of American workers

to prevent them from sliding further into the basement.

This is, and always has been, an issue of equity and fairness for working men and women in this country and I strongly encourage my colleagues to support this amendment and vote against the motion to table.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise today in strong support of the Kennedy amendment and as a cosponsor of the minimum wage increase.

I cannot sit idle as I hear of those struggling to live on today's minimum wage. I thought, like many of you, that the minimum wage earner was my daughter or one of her friends: a teenager flipping burgers or taking food orders to earn some extra cash for new clothes or a movie.

That is the misperception though. The sad fact is that 71 percent of those workers who benefited from the last increase were adults over the age of 20. This increase will benefit those that need it most—working families at the bottom. A full-time, year-round minimum wage worker in 1997 earned only \$10,712, \$2,000 less than the \$12,803 needed to raise a family of three out of poverty. Some 40 percent of minimum wage workers are the sole income-earners in their families.

I am immensely troubled with the fact that 58 percent of those struggling with a minimum wage are women. These millions of women, many of them single mothers, would benefit directly from this increase.

These single moms are trying. Trying to raise two kids on a below-poverty income. And how does Congress reward these single parents? By attacking Medicaid that would have paid for her son's asthma medicine. By cutting her child care support that allows her work. By taking away funding for nutrition programs that pay for her kids to eat at school or day care. By eliminating her Head Start Program that gives her kids a chance at starting school ready to learn. By refusing to add one dollar to her hourly wage—a wage that pays for heat, clothing and food.

Aren't these the individuals and families we are trying to keep employed and off of federal support? Instead, this Congress has targeted the low-income family through cut after cut and a resistance to move them above the poverty line.

This amendment does not eliminate jobs, it barely keeps people working, who otherwise would be completely reliant on public support. Today's minimum wage is 18 percent below the 1979 level. Each year we wait means a loss of \$2,000 to that single mother. To that low-income family, that would have meant more than seven months of groceries, four months of rent, a full year of health care costs, or nine months of utility bills.

I did not reach my decision to support the minimum wage easily. I have listened carefully to the concerns of small-business owners from across my

state, who have highlighted the implications of this increase. I don't want to see prices for the American consumer rise or jobs eliminated. But I don't think an increase to the minimum wage will end employment in small business, either.

Now is the time to adjust that inequality and demonstrate a true commitment to our working families. A slight increase in this wage provides those who work hard and play by the rules an increased opportunity and a chance to succeed. If any of my colleagues oppose the minimum wage, I urge them to try living on \$10,712 this year and then reconsider their vote.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I rise today to voice my strong support for raising the minimum wage. In 1996, Congress helped millions of working Americans by increasing the minimum wage by 90 cents over two years. Passing that historic measure was a good first step. Now, it is time for us to take another one.

I am proud to be cosponsoring the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 1998, a bill that will help even more Americans take that next step. This much-needed legislation would raise the hourly minimum wage to \$6.15 over the next two years. The first part of this bill would take effect on January 1, 1999, and would raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$5.65 per hour. Then, on January 1, 2000, the minimum wage would be raised to \$6.15 per hour.

I support this minimum wage increase for many of the same reasons I supported the last one. In 1995, I said that an increase in the minimum wage would help working Americans improve their standard of living. I said that it would help them move one step closer to self-sufficiency. And I said that it would give them the opportunity to practice self-help.

It has done all these things, and it has helped business and trade at the same time. The results in my state alone tell the story. Since we increased the minimum wage in 1996, employment in Maryland is up and unemployment is down. We've added 54,500 new jobs since September 1996, and the unemployment rate dropped to 4.7%. I'd say that's progress.

I believe we can expand upon the progress we've already made by increasing the minimum wage again. A minimum wage increase would give a raise to more than 129,000 Marylanders and their families. It would enable Marylanders to improve their standard of living. It would move them closer to self-sufficiency. And it would allow them to practice self-help.

An increase in the minimum wage equals an increase in the standard of living for working Americans. This is especially important to me. Since I first came to Congress, my economic mission has always been a pretty simple one: to help those who are in the middle class stay there or do better and to give those who are not in the middle class the chance to get there. I

support this bill because it gets at the heart of my mission. I know that to some people, a \$1.00 increase in the minimum wage over the course of two years may not seem like much at all. But even a small increase like this one will mean a whole lot to many others.

An increase in the minimum wage will also help many Americans move one step closer to economic self-sufficiency. We all know by now that minimum wage workers aren't just high school kids working part-time jobs after school and on the weekends. In fact, two-thirds of minimum wage earners are adults, and nearly 60% are mothers, many with young kids to support.

We don't have to tell working moms who are struggling to make ends meet what an extra \$1.00 an hour means. An extra \$1.00 an hour means more groceries in the refrigerator. An extra \$1.00 an hour means that the mortgage or the rent gets paid. An extra \$1.00 an hour means a full tank of gas in the car. And, most importantly, an extra \$1.00 an hour can mean more time to spend with their families. That single dollar goes a long way for those moms.

Finally, an increase in the minimum wage will give people the opportunity to practice self-help. For too long now, Americans, including those working moms, have been working longer and harder only to see their paychecks get smaller and smaller. This cycle has got to stop. Those Americans who are working for minimum wage are not asking for handouts. They're asking for fair pay for hard work.

Right now, even after the previous minimum wage increase, a mother who works full-time—that's 40 hours per week and 52 weeks a year—earns only about \$10,700 a year. That is \$2,600 below the poverty level for a family of three. I don't think that someone who shows up everyday and works hard should be condemned to a life in poverty. A fair day's work should mean a fair day's pay.

Does that \$10,700 salary reward a working mom's hard work? No. Does that salary give her an incentive to stay off welfare? No. Does that salary give her the time to walk her kids to school, help them with their homework, or even read to them at night? Absolutely not. In fact, that \$10,700 salary barely allows her to clothe them, put a roof over their heads, or put food on the table. No mom should have to make the choice between paying the heating bill or buying her child new school shoes. Forcing working moms to make choices like that is wrong.

That same mom who works full-time, plays by the rules, and does everything else we ask of her ought to be able to get ahead. I don't think that's asking too much. Hard-working minimum wage workers are just like everyone else—they want to climb up the American economic ladder. Too often, however, that ladder looks too tall to climb. Too often, the rungs on that ladder are too far apart from each other.

Too often they are just a little bit out of reach. As representatives of those workers, we can help them climb that ladder. We can and should give them that little push they need to grasp the next rung. This bill gives them that little boost, and that is why it has my full support.

Ms. MOSELEY-BRAUN. Mr. President, I wish to take a moment to speak about a few of the compelling reasons that the Senate should pass the amendment to increase the minimum wage by \$1.00 per hour by the year 2000.

I am a cosponsor of this legislation because I believe that by raising the minimum wage now, we can accomplish a number of critical objectives. We can improve the quality of life for millions of Americans, expand the market for all of the goods and services that the workers of our nation produce, increase the amount of taxable income in the country, reduce expenditures for public assistance, close the ever-increasing gap between working people and wealthy individuals, and—certainly not least—honor the American tradition of rewarding hard work and perseverance.

The current minimum wage is not a living wage for the millions of Americans who try to support themselves and their families on \$5.15 an hour. Today, 6.2 million Americans earn the minimum wage. In my state alone, 5.7 percent of the workforce—making up roughly 296,000 people—earns that salary. This means that an Illinoisan, working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, earns only \$10,712 per year. That's about \$2,600 below the poverty line for a family of three and over \$5,700 below the poverty line for a family of four. And make no mistake about it—this is an issue that directly affects families. As much as opponents of this amendment would like us to believe that the minimum wage primarily affects teenagers working at their first jobs, the actual fact is that three-fourths of those earning the minimum wage are adults, many trying to support families. And with respect to the fact that one-fourth of those who will be assisted by this legislation are teenagers, we should bear in mind that many teenage minimum-wage workers contribute the money they earn (or at least a portion of it) to their families' total income.

A \$1.00 increase in the minimum wage would provide a full-time worker earning the minimum wage with a little over \$2,000 a year in additional income. That money could pay for more than seven months of groceries, more than four months of rent or mortgage bills, over a full year of health care, or more than nine months of utility bills for a family living on the minimum wage. That \$2,000 would make a world of difference to such a family.

Moreover, a family that can pay for rent, groceries, or health care is putting money back into the economy. That family is buying goods and services produced by other workers. It is also earning taxable income and reduc-

ing the amount government has to spend on public assistance. An increase in the minimum wage helps people to contribute to, rather than burden, the nation's economy. And it wouldn't just be minimum wage workers who would be able to make a greater contribution to the economy. Currently, there are almost six million Americans who earn between \$5.16 and \$6.14 per hour who would also receive a pay raise if this amendment were to become law. All 12 million Americans who stand to benefit from this legislation—not just the 6.2 million earning the minimum wage—must be taken into account when we consider the fact that adopting this amendment would increase the pool of consumers and increase taxable earnings.

I wish to take this opportunity to dispel a myth that many opponents of increasing the minimum wage have put forward over the years: that paying a living wage means losing jobs. Around the time that we debated raising the minimum wage from \$4.25 to \$5.15 per hour, a group of respected economists, including three Nobel Prize winners, concluded that such an increase would have positive effects on the labor market, workers, and the economy. In 1996 we went ahead and raised the minimum wage to \$5.15 per hour and what happened? Bureau of Labor Statistics data show that employment increased. Four million new jobs have been created since that time. Unemployment has hovered around its lowest rate in a generation. This will not surprise anyone familiar with the scholarly literature on this issue. The Economic Policy Institute studied the effect of the last minimum wage increase on the economy and found that it had no negative impact on jobs or inflation. A recent study by economists at Berkeley and Princeton Universities showed that the type of moderate increases in the minimum wage that we are debating today do not cost jobs. It should be noted that their research included the increase we enacted two years ago.

Some have argued that small businesses would be hurt by Senator KENNEDY's amendment. The reality is that many such businesses will suffer if we do not raise the minimum wage. Small businesses which right now pay a living wage to their employees are at a competitive disadvantage with those that try to cut costs by slashing wages. This creates a race to the bottom with the most profits going to companies paying the lowest wages. Adopting this amendment will ensure that all businesses will be able to afford to pay a decent wage to their workers.

I would like to make a point regarding how this amendment would affect single working women. Twenty percent of those earning the minimum wage are female heads of households. These are women who are taking responsibility for themselves and their children. They are doing precisely what we have told them we expect them to do: get a job and go to work every day. We

have told them that AFDC is a thing of the past, that they cannot rely on the government to take care of their families. I am not seeking to re-open the welfare reform debate. But I do want to know how we can send these women that very clear message and then fail to provide a minimum wage that allows them to support their families at a level above the poverty line? The fact that a single mother working full-time cannot bring her family out of poverty represents a clear policy failure on our part. With this legislation, we have the opportunity to take a step towards addressing it.

Right now, our economy is strong. The unemployment rate is low and new jobs are being created in record numbers. This economic strength, however, has not translated into increased wages for many of those on the lower rungs of the economic ladder. In fact, the income disparity between the richest and the poorest is increasing. Consider, for example, what has happened in my state. Over the last 20 years, the income disparity between the richest and poorest Illinoisans has increased by over 46 percent. During that time, the average income of the poorest twenty percent of families in Illinois fell by \$1,460 to \$10,000. At the same time, the average income of the richest twenty percent increased by over \$25,000. An increase in the minimum wage will help close that gap.

I conclude by reminding my colleagues that at the heart of the American Dream lies the belief that hard work is the foundation of success. Fortunately, for most people in this country, that remains a valid notion. But it is not for those who earn the minimum wage. We must guarantee that those attempting to provide for themselves and their families by earning the minimum wage receive a living wage. Here in Washington, we talk a great deal about family values and the American Dream. There's nothing wrong with that as long as we stand up for those ideals ourselves when given the opportunity. This amendment represents just such an opportunity and I strongly urge my colleagues to vote for it.

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I rise today to urge my colleagues to support efforts to increase the federal minimum wage by passing the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 1998. This important legislation will provide American laborers with a 50 cent increase to the minimum wage on January 1, 1999, and a second increase on January 1, 2000. This modest increase, which would raise the minimum wage to \$6.15 per hour, will help 12 million lower income Americans.

Our country's economy is growing. It's economic vitality and the success of welfare reform have resulted in better news and a better life for working people. Or have they?

The truth is, even though the economy is on an up-swing, wages are stagnant and people are still living in poverty. In fact, over half a million people

live in poverty in our own state of Wisconsin.

Despite successes in the welfare to work initiative, last year, a US Conference of Mayors study indicated that eighty-six percent of cities reported an increased demand for emergency food assistance. Thirty-eight percent of those people seeking food at soup kitchens and shelters were employed. This is an increase of fifteen percent since 1994. It is evident that, in many cases, minimum wage workers can not afford to feed themselves or their families.

Mr. President, no hard working American should have to worry about affording groceries, shoes for their kids, or medicines. The people whom the bill will help are not people who spend their money frivolously, these are the families who scrimp and save to provide their children with the necessities of life: shelter, food, clothes and an education.

In a recent study, *The State of Working Wisconsin—1998*, by the Center on Wisconsin Strategy, we find some troubling news regarding wages. Today, the Wisconsin median hourly wage is still 8.4% below its 1979 level. Since 1979, Wisconsin's median wage declined 50% faster than the 5.3 percent national decline over the same period. These numbers are, sadly, not Wisconsin specific. This is the situation all over the country.

I urge my colleagues to bring some respect and dignity to the federal minimum wage. America's labor force deserves a chance to be successful and we need to give them the tools. I urge them to support the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 1998. Its a vote in support of every full time worker hoping to make ends meet.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, the minimum wage is about fairness. The minimum wage should be a fair wage that rewards people for an honest day's work.

This is the right time to provide fairness by increasing the minimum wage. Our budget is balanced and the economy remains fundamentally strong. We've created new jobs at an historically high pace of 250,000 per month. The inflation rate has averaged just 2.5 percent since 1993—the lowest rate since the Kennedy Administration—and the unemployment rate has fallen from over 7 percent in 1992 to 4.5 percent for the past two months.

However, as the economy rolls along, it is leaving behind working families. The benefits of this strong economy are not being enjoyed by lower wage workers.

In fact, according to a U.S. Conference of Mayors study, 38 percent of people seeking emergency food aid in 1996 held jobs—up from 23 percent in 1994. Low-paying jobs are the most-frequently cited cause of hunger today according to this survey.

People who are willing to work should not have to turn to a soup kitchen in order to feed their families.

There is no better time than now to address the problem of fair wages in this country.

A full time minimum wage worker now earns just \$10,712 per year—\$2,600 below the poverty level for a family of three. To have the same purchasing power it had in 1968, the minimum wage today would have to be \$7.33 an hour instead of \$5.15.

Even where the current minimum wage is a little higher in my state—\$5.75. The purchasing power of the wage is over \$2.00 an hour lower than the purchasing power of the minimum wage in 1968. After adjusting for inflation, today's \$5.75 minimum buys 26 percent less than it did in 1968.

Nationwide, 4.8 million families depend on the minimum wage for their sole source of income. Of the workers that would benefit from an increase, 60 percent are women—over 7 million women, and 57 percent are families in the bottom 40 percent of the income scale.

In my state alone, almost 10 percent of the workforce would benefit from an increase in the minimum wage—nearly 1.2 million Californians and their families.

Opponents of a minimum wage increase argue that minimum wage increases result in massive job losses. I believe—and the data prove—they are wrong.

The National Restaurant Association claims a study found that over 146,000 restaurant jobs were lost as a result of the 1996–97 minimum wage increases. In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics say that as of April 1998, 187,000 new restaurant jobs were created since the minimum wage increases in 1996.

The retail industry has many minimum wage jobs in California. Since September 1996, 97,000 retail jobs have been added in California.

The job numbers tell the story. We have increased the minimum wage to its current level of \$5.15 per hour, yet the number of unemployed Americans has dropped consistently over the past six years. Since 1992, 3 million less Americans are jobless. In fact, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 16.3 million jobs have been created since January 1993.

Clearly this is an issue of fairness. Everyone in this country deserves an honest, fair wage for a hard day's work. No one who is willing to work should have to take their children to a soup kitchen at night in order to feed them.

Senator KENNEDY's amendment would increase the minimum wage in two increments of 50 cents each—to \$5.65 on January 1st, 1999 and to \$6.15 on January 1st, 2000. After the first increase, a minimum wage earner would make about \$11,700 annually. And after the second increase, a minimum wage worker would earn about \$12,700 each year—still \$600 below the poverty level.

Unemployment is at historically low levels. Job creation has boomed in the past six years. There is no better time to address this problem. The time for a

modest increase in the minimum wage is now.

#### CONSUMER BANKRUPTCY REFORM ACT OF 1998

The Senate continued with the consideration of the bill.

AMENDMENT NO. 3540

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the hour of 2:15 p.m. having arrived, there will now be 5 minutes for debate, equally divided, prior to a vote relative to the Kennedy amendment.

Mr. KENNEDY addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I yield myself 2 minutes 15 seconds.

At long last, the Senate is about to vote on raising the minimum wage. The Nation has enjoyed extraordinary prosperity in recent years. Unemployment and inflation are at their lowest levels in a generation. Interest rates are low, and the economy is strong and growing. But 12 million hard-working Americans are left out and left behind. They are minimum wage workers, and for them, the current prosperity is someone else's boom. Working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks of the year, minimum wage workers earn just \$10,700 a year, \$2,900 below the poverty level for a family of three.

A full day's work should mean a fair day's pay. But for these 12 million Americans, it does not. These hard-pressed Americans can barely make ends meet every month. Too often they are forced to choose between paying the light bill or the phone bill or the heating bill. An unexpected illness or family crisis is enough to push them over the edge.

Their plight is shocking and unacceptable. If this country values work as we say we do, we must be willing to pay these workers a decent wage. The wealthiest nation on Earth can afford to do better for these hard-working citizens, and today we have the opportunity to do so. We can raise the minimum wage.

Giving workers another 50 cents an hour may not sound like much, but it can make all the difference for these hard-working Americans. It can help buy groceries or pay the rent or defray the costs of job training courses at the local community college.

The minimum wage is a women's issue. It is a children's issue. It is a civil rights issue. It is a labor issue. It is a family issue. Above all, it is a fairness issue and a dignity issue. Raising the minimum wage is a matter of fundamental fairness and simple justice.

In a few moments, the Senate will have the opportunity to do more than pay lip service to these basic principles. If we believe in these ideals, we will vote to raise the minimum wage. No one who works for a living should have to live in poverty.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time?