

“Business Seeks Tax Breaks in Wage Bill”—I believe I heard the Senator from Massachusetts say perhaps to the tune of \$100 billion or thereabouts.

I want to say to Senators, I think this minimum wage bill goes to the heart and soul of the question of whether we have a heart and soul as a Senate. We are now at \$5.15 an hour, and we are talking about trying to get this up to \$6.15 an hour, then to \$6.65 an hour, in increments.

I am going to make two or three points. The first is personal, but it really is true. If we are going to vote ourselves a raise of over \$4,000 a year—Senators make about \$140,000—some a year—it seems to me we ought to be able to vote for a raise in the wage of the lowest paid workers. We are talking about people who work 40 hours a week, almost 52 weeks a year, and they are still poor.

I think there is no standard of justice here if we are going to vote a hefty increase for ourselves—we are handsomely rewarded for our work—and yet are unable to raise the minimum wage for the lowest paid workers.

Second, in Minnesota there is a stereotype that it is teenagers working part-time who receive the minimum wage. The fact is, many more people are paid the minimum wage. At the moment—and we will see what happens with the economy, some employers are paying higher wages—many people are working minimum wage, a disproportionate number of them women. I think it is a matter of elementary justice for women and other working poor people to raise the minimum wage.

Finally, it takes some real chutzpah on the part of my colleagues, the Republican leadership, to say the only way you are going to get a minimum wage bill through, which speaks to people who are working 52 weeks a year and are still poor in America, is to add in all kinds of corporate welfare and breaks for large businesses.

Democratic Senators, that is the deal you have to accept. We are going to bleed the revenue base with these Robin-Hood-in-reverse tax cuts that the majority party is trying to push through the Senate this week or next week, with over 40 percent of the benefits going to the top 1 percent, and a pittance, if that, for children, for education. Whatever happened to our commitment for affordable prescription drug costs for elderly people? Now, according to this piece, the strategy is to load onto a minimum wage bill more corporate welfare and more breaks for large financial interests and economic interests in the country.

I think it is transparent. I look forward to the debate. Not that long ago—it seems like just yesterday—we had several weeks’ worth of debate about campaign finance reform. There were a variety of different arguments made. I suggest that our failure to raise the minimum wage is all about the need for campaign finance reform. These working poor people, men and women

in our States—nobody can say they are not hard working—who cannot support their families, they are the last people in the world to be able to hire the lobbyists. They do not have lobbying coalitions here. They are the last people in the world to give the big contributions. They are the last people in the world to be the investors in either political party.

But you know what? If you believe it is important for people to earn a decent standard of living so they can support their families and give their children the care they know their children need and deserve, then we ought to be willing to support a raise in the minimum wage. It is just unbelievable to see in today’s Washington Post this story.

I don’t know, maybe I should not be surprised. Frankly, I do not want to be dishonest. You never want to be dishonest. I don’t want to feign total shock because I have looked at the greed that is reflected by this tax cut bill that my colleagues want to bring to the floor, and I have looked at who gets the benefits. So I guess I should not be surprised that now what we have is this all-out vigorous opposition to raising the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.15 and to \$6.65 unless there is corporate welfare, unless we do well by all these large economic interests, unless we get yet more tax breaks for them.

It is really pretty simple to figure out. When I was a political science professor, was it Harold Lasswell’s definition that politics is all about who gets what, when, why? That is what this question is about: Who gets what, when, and why?

As I would put it as a Senator from Minnesota: Who decides and who benefits and who is asked to sacrifice? Who decides to keep the minimum wage so low that there are so many people who are poor still today in America?

If you are working hard, and, as some of my colleagues have said, playing by the rules of the game, then you shouldn’t be poor in America. You should be able to support your family.

Who decides to keep the minimum wage down? Who decides that instead now we have to load on all kinds of corporate welfare and all kinds of additional tax breaks for large economic interests in the country?

I think people in the country are going to focus on this debate. I look forward to joining Senator KENNEDY and other Senators.

I remember a number of years ago when we first started this debate. I am a proud original cosponsor of this legislation. I don’t think any of the arguments that have been made about how, if we raise the minimum wage, we would see a decline in jobs that turned out to be true. The last time we had a raise in the minimum wage—it was very modest—we had colleagues in the Chamber talking about how people were going to lose their jobs. It didn’t happen. I would be willing to say that if there is a point at which you raise

the minimum wage at too high of a level you could lose jobs, but it is not going from \$5.15 an hour to \$6.65 an hour.

It seems to me Senators are in a fairly awkward situation when we voted ourselves over a \$4,000 increase in our already high salary and we are not willing to vote to raise the minimum wage for working poor women and men in this country from \$5.15 an hour to \$6.65 an hour so people have a better chance of being able to support their children and support their families. This is a perfect example of the song that was written by Florence Reese from Harland County, KY—the song about which side you are on. In this particular case, it is, whose side are you on? Are you on the side of hard-working people? We all say we are for hard-working people. Or are you on the side of large economic interests? Are you on the side of elementary justice to raise the minimum wage for workers and their families? Or are you going to insist on somewhere in the neighborhood of \$100 billion of yet more tax breaks for economic interests so there is even less for children, even less for education, and even less for affordable prescription drug costs?

I am telling you, my colleagues like to say in the Republican majority that some of these comments are class warfare. And I just have to smile because if there ever were an example of “class warfare”, if that is what you want to call it, it would be a U.S. Senate that is so generous to itself in giving ourselves big increases in a big salary and are unwilling to raise the minimum wage for poor working people in our States and in our country.

I yield the floor.

TRIBUTE TO CRAIG M. SOMERS

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to the outstanding accomplishments of Craig Somers throughout his 32-year career with the U.S. Senate. I, along with my colleagues, congratulate Craig on his retirement from the Sergeant At Arms Office.

His Senate career began in August of 1962, as a part-time employee and Senate page. In 1969, he became employed full-time with the Printing, Graphics & Direct Mail Department, then known as the Service Department, where he acquired many varied skills, including his initial position as an Addressograph Operator. Craig worked his way up to his current position as the Night Supervisor of the Lithographics Department.

All of us in the Senate thank Craig for his tireless efforts with our printing needs and processing of our constituent mail. His work has helped us keep in touch with those we represent.

Craig, we congratulate you and wish you well in your retirement.