

A Vote on the Minimum Wage?

Minimum Wage: Background

In the Bush Economy – marked by rising housing, healthcare, gas, and college costs, and declining real wages – workers are being forced to do more with less, even while corporate profits continue to grow and the wealthiest Americans get even richer.

Democrats believe that Congress has a moral obligation to ensure all working Americans earn a fair wage, and have been trying for several years to increase the minimum wage. No American who works full-time, all year, should live in poverty.

Republicans have prevented an increase in the minimum wage and blocked even a vote on the House Floor – until now. Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer successfully offered in Committee an [amendment](#) to the FY07 Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations Bill similar to Rep. George Miller's bill to raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 an hour to \$7.25 an hour over two years. The Hoyer amendment sets up the first House Floor vote in a decade.

As a result, Republicans have pulled the LHHS bill from Floor consideration the week of June 19th – and it is not clear when they will bring the bill to the Floor.

Democrats increased the pressure on Republicans this week by offering the Hoyer amendment to the Science, Justice, State Appropriations Bill in Committee. All Republicans voted against it (including five of the seven who supported the amendment the previous week, the other two left the room and did not vote). In a week when Republicans are pushing for a drastic cut in the estate tax, which benefits only the wealthiest few, this vote was a clear demonstration of the differing priorities of Democrats and Republicans.

Minimum Wage: Basic Facts

- Congress has not raised the minimum wage since 1997
- The minimum wage is [now at its lowest level in 50 years](#) (adjusted for inflation)
- If the minimum wage had been indexed for inflation since 1968, it would be \$9.05 today
- It's impossible to make even the most basic ends meet on \$5.15 per hour
- A minimum wage earner working full-time all year will earn just \$10,700
- It takes a full day's pay for a minimum wage earner to pay for one tank of gas
- 6.6 million people would benefit from a raise in the minimum wage
- Of the 6.6 million workers who would benefit from an increase in the minimum wage, 1.6 million are parents with children under age 18
- About three-quarters of minimum wage workers are adults over the age of 20, many of whom are responsible for over half of their family's income
- 86% of Americans support a raise in the minimum wage (Pew, December 2005)
- There is no evidence of job loss following minimum wage increases. A study released by the Center for American Progress and Policy Matters Ohio in May 2006 found that between 1997 and 2003:
 - Employment in small businesses grew more (9.4%) in states with higher minimum wages than federal minimum wage states (6.6%)
 - Inflation-adjusted small business payroll growth was stronger in high minimum wage states (19.0%) than in federal minimum wage states (13.6%)