

## **URGE CONGRESS TO INCREASE FEDERAL MINIMUM WAGE**

--ByCarolynn Race

[October 18, 2005] This week, Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) offered an amendment to increase the minimum wage to the fiscal 2006 Transportation-Treasury-Housing appropriations legislation (HR 3058). This legislation (which also includes an automatic pay increase for members of Congress) is before the floor in the Senate today. The Kennedy amendment could be voted on in the next few days.

Kennedy's amendment would raise the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour in three steps:

- \$5.85 60 days after enactment
- \$6.55 one year later
- \$7.25 one year after that

In March, Senator Kennedy offered a similar amendment. It was rejected 46-49. Senator Santorum (R-PA) offered an amendment at that time to increase the minimum wage to \$6.25 over 18 months and also to provide several tax cuts to small businesses. His amendment was rejected 38-61. The current minimum wage is \$5.15 and has not been increased since 1997.

"In light of the growing disparity in household income and the past positions of the General Assembly," the 200th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) "urge[d] the President and Congress of the United States to raise the minimum wage to its historical level of 50 percent of the average non-supervisory, nonagricultural wage and provide for regular increases that will keep the minimum wage at an adequate level to lift people out of poverty." According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average hourly earning of production workers was \$15.85 in 2004.

Minimum wage employees working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, earn \$10,700 a year, \$5,000 below the poverty line for a family of three. The current minimum wage fails to provide enough income to enable minimum wage workers to afford adequate housing in any area of this country.

Raising the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour will mean an additional \$4,370 a year to help minimum wage earners support their families. That's enough for a minimum wage family to buy

- \* Almost two years of child care
- \* Full tuition for a community college degree
- \* A year and a half of heat and electricity
- \* More than a year of groceries
- \* More than 9 months of rent

Contact your Senators and urge them to vote for the Kennedy amendment to raise the minimum wage to \$7.25 and against any amendment that would lower the minimum wage increase or weaken workers' overtime and minimum wage protections.

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Sample Letter:

Dear Senator:

As a Presbyterian, I am writing to urge you to support the Kennedy minimum wage amendment to the fiscal 2006 Transportation-Treasury-Housing appropriations legislation (HR 3058). The federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour has not

increased since 1997. Minimum wage employees working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, earn \$10,700 a year, \$5,000 below the poverty line for a family of three. The current minimum wage fails to provide enough income to enable minimum wage workers to afford adequate housing in any area of this country.

My denomination's General Assembly passed a resolution calling on Congress to "provide for regular increases that will keep the minimum wage at an adequate level to lift people out of poverty."

A fair increase in the minimum wage is overdue. Please act quickly to pass a minimum wage increase.

Thank you.