

**PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION**

Minimum Wage Event  
Capitol Hill  
9/28/99

**Minimum Wage Event with Senator Kennedy**  
**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton**  
**Capitol Hill**  
**September 28, 1999**

Thank you very much. Thank you. I am delighted to be here with all of you to support the increase in the minimum wage and to highlight yet again another study that demonstrates how important raising the minimum wage is. And I certainly recommend this study to anyone who needs to study this issue, because we now have proven once again through analysis of economic data that the minimum wage is a good deal. It's a good deal for the economy, it's a good deal for workers, it's a good deal for our country.

There are a number of people here who have been stalwart champions of the needs of working families, particularly working women. I want to thank Representative Bonior and Secretary Herman. I also want to thank Jared and Heidi and their colleagues, who have done such a great job.

In the audience there are a few other people who I have recognized, who I know have been on the front lines of fighting for the needs of working people. And particularly—I see our good friend Evie here—I want to thank you, Evie, for being here and for all the work you've done.

Now when we come again to ask the Congress to give working Americans a raise, it's fair to ask just what does this mean and who does it affect? Well, the work that people on minimum wage do is vital work. It is the work of caring for children. It is the work of ringing up the food at the supermarket. It is the work of cooking and serving our meals. It is the work of cleaning our offices, of cutting and sewing our clothes, of caring for our aging parents and grandparents.

The wage increase that Congressman Bonior and Senator Kennedy are urging would mean a direct raise of \$2,000 a year for these working Americans. Now I have met a lot of people, particularly women, across our country who have detailed to me the difference \$2,000 a year would make in their lives and the lives of their children—how that could mean seven months worth of groceries, or five months worth of rent, or 10 months worth of utilities. An extra dollar an hour might mean they would no longer have to worry about whether they had to try to find a second job and take time away from their family.

There will be no better time to raise the minimum wage. Francis Perkins was right all those years ago; our economy is stronger when everyone shares in the benefits of economic growth and prosperity. Because of this administration's fiscally sound and socially responsible policies, we do have a record 19 million new jobs, the lowest unemployment rate in a generation, and record-breaking homeownership rates. And the Earned Income Tax Credit has been the single biggest anti-poverty measure in our country's history next to Social Security.

So we have done a lot in the last six and a half years—the Administration and members of Congress working together to try to give working Americans a fairer chance and to make sure that work pays. But there are still millions of American who are not realizing the full benefit of this economic prosperity.

You know, the value of the minimum wage dropped more than 25 percent during the 1980s. I just want you to think about that. If you had been working for the minimum wage, and you had been getting up every single day and you'd been going to work to clean those offices or serve those meals, every year you worked, the value of what you brought home dropped. By 1998, we know that the comparison of just 20 years before meant that in—well, even 20 years before, a woman or a man working at a minimum wage full time wouldn't be living in poverty. Twenty years later that was no longer the case. I don't think it's right that any person in our country works full time and brings home wages that leaves that person and that person's family in poverty.

The proposal pending before the Congress to increase the minimum wage would simply restore the real value of the minimum wage to what it was in 1982. We're not asking for special favors for these millions and millions of people who do a lot of the work that keeps this country going. We're asking for fairness and for respect and for economic security, and for the chance to share in the prosperity that so many of the rest of us have enjoyed.

America can afford to raise the minimum wage. The last time it was raised in 1996, 10 million Americans got a raise and the economy continued to create jobs at an unprecedented pace.

Now raising the minimum wage is certainly an American issue and a human issue, but it is particularly a woman's issue. It is also a children's issue and a family issue. So I would hope that every member of Congress—the next time they visit a parent in a nursing home, sit down in a restaurant for a meal, see someone cleaning their office, or know what goes on in so many other settings where people work hard every day—would want every American to share in this kind of prosperity, and would want to raise the minimum wage.

If I'm not mistaken, we have voted to raise the congressional wage—haven't we, David? And I would like to see members of Congress do the same for these 12 million working Americans.

And there isn't anyone who has championed this cause more or worked harder to make sure that working Americans did get a fair shot and that their contributions to our country and our economy were respected and recognized, than a man who has been a great champion and a great spokesman for a lot of the important issues of the last half of this century—does that scare you a little bit, Ted?—and that is the senior senator from Massachusetts, Ted Kennedy.