

# UPDATE

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Legislative Update #54

June 22, 2006

## MINIMUM WAGE

Congress has once again rejected raising the minimum wage, leaving millions of America's working families struggling to support themselves and their families. While Members of Congress managed to increase their own pay, and while the costs of goods, services, and energy prices continues to rise, the federal wage minimum wage has remained unchanged for a decade. Full-time work at the \$5.15 an hour minimum wage yields only \$10,712 a year—far below the poverty line for a family.

### Senate Action

The Senate failed to pass an amendment that would have raised the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour. Although we had a majority vote, the final vote of 52–46 was short the required 60 votes needed to pass the amendment. All the Democrats present (Senator Rockefeller (D-WV) and Senator Shelby (R-AL) were absent) supported the amendment along with one Independent (James Jeffords (I-VT)) and eight Republicans including Lincoln Chafee (R-RI), Norm Coleman (R-MN), Susan Collins (R-ME), Mike DeWine (R-OH), Richard Lugar (R-IN), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Arlen Specter (R-PA), and John Warner (R-VA). All other Republicans voted against increasing the minimum wage.

### House Action

In the House, Representative David Obey (D-WI), offered a minimum wage amendment to the Labor Health and Human Services Appropriations bill which passed with the support of seven Republican Representatives. The House Republican Leadership however, removed the bill from House floor consideration in order to avoid a vote on increasing minimum wage. When Representative Obey then attempted to attach the minimum wage provision to a different appropriations bill, five Republican Representatives switched their votes and voted *against* raising the minimum wage. These Representatives are Ray LaHood (R-IL), Don Sherwood (R-PA), Mike Simpson (R-ID), James Walsh (R-NY), and Don Young (R-AK). Representative Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO) and Representative John Sweeney (R-NY), mysteriously disappeared and did not vote.

### Summary

Since 1997, the House of Representatives has not voted to raise the minimum wage. The House Republican Leadership has manipulated the process and twisted the arms of its members to stop any increase in the minimum wage. And yet, it has found a way to raise Members' own salaries. Meanwhile in the Senate, minimum wage advocates are forced to get 60 votes, not a simple majority of 51, in order to win a vote and raise the wages of those who earn the least in this country. UFCW will continue to fight for an increase in minimum wage on Capitol Hill. UFCW will also support minimum wage referendum campaigns in states like Arizona, California, Colorado, Missouri, Montana, Ohio, and Nevada. In the end, however, our best strategy to raise the minimum wage is to vote in November and to change the Congress.

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