

# **Minimum Wage Rally**

**July 22, 2015**

**Washington, D.C.**

Let me begin by thanking Joseph Geevarghese with Good Jobs Nation and Congressmen Keith Ellison from Minnesota; Raul Grijalva from Arizona; Sheila Jackson-Lee from Texas and Janice Hahn from California for being here today.

Most importantly, I want to thank all of the workers who are fighting for \$15 an hour and a union!

We are here today to send a very loud and a very clear message to the United States Congress, the President of the United States and corporate America: In the richest country on the face of the earth, no one who works 40 hours a week should be living in poverty.

In the year 2015, a job has got to lift workers out of poverty, not keep them in it. The \$7.25 an hour federal minimum wage is a starvation wage. It has got to be increased to a living wage!

That means raising the minimum wage to at least \$15 an hour!

That means closing the loophole that allows employers to pay tipped workers a shamefully low \$2.13 an hour!

And that means demanding that Senate contractors and federal contractors pay all of their workers a living wage with affordable healthcare, decent benefits and the right to collectively bargain! And that's exactly why we are here today.

Today, more than half of all African American workers and nearly 60 percent of Latino workers make less than \$15 an hour. That is unacceptable!

The American people need a raise! We have got to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and we are introducing legislation today to do just that!

Since 1968, the minimum wage has lost over 30 percent of its purchasing power. That has got to change. But that's not all!

The President has got to sign an executive order so that every federal contract worker in this country is paid a living wage with good benefits and the ability to join a union.

Today, the largest low-wage employer in this country is not McDonald's. It's not Burger King. It's not Walmart.

The reality is that the largest low-wage employer in this country is the federal government. That has got to change. It's time for the federal government to be a model employer, not a low-wage employer.

It's time for an executive order for \$15 and a union!

The Senate must act to require all of its contractors to pay workers a living wage with good benefits and a right to organize. The people who serve our food and clean our offices should not be forced to work two or three jobs just to pay the bills!

It is unconscionable that workers in the Senate cafeteria, workers like Charles Gladden who is with us today, make wages so low that they cannot afford to pay the rent.

It is time for the Senate to end this tragedy, not years from now, not months from now, not weeks from now, but today!

The good news is that cities and states are not waiting for Congress to act.

Los Angeles, Seattle, and San Francisco have all passed laws increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour over the next few years.

26 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws increasing the minimum wage above \$7.25 an hour.

Now, Republicans, and even some Democrats will say that we cannot increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour because it will destroy jobs.

Well, I say to them: look at the small town of SeaTac, Washington. In January of 2014, SeaTac immediately raised its minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Did the unemployment rate in that community go up? No, it went

down from 6.3 percent to 4.6 percent.

Instead of downsizing, restaurants and hotels have expanded their businesses. That's because when people have more money in their pockets they become more productive.

When workers don't have to worry about how they are going to feed their families or pay the rent, they become better workers. And when low-wage workers get a raise they spend their money in local businesses and that creates more jobs, not less!

It's time to reduce poverty, expand the economy, and create good paying jobs! It's time to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour!