

wage worker who works 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year still makes just \$10,700 a year—\$6,000 below the poverty line for a family of three.

The American people understand fairness, and they know this is unfair. No one who works for a living should have to live in poverty. That's why an overwhelming majority of Americans – 88 percent – support an increase in the minimum wage.

We know that majorities in both houses of Congress support a minimum wage increase, too. In June, 52 Senators – including eight Republicans – supported our proposal to raise the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour. In July, the House supported a higher minimum wage by a vote of 260-159, with 64 Republicans crossing party lines to vote for the increase.

It's obvious that if we had a clean vote on raising the minimum wage, it would pass both the House and the Senate and be signed by President Bush. Almost 15 million hardworking Americans would get a well-deserved raise.

But the Republican leadership is against the increase. They kowtow to corporate special interests who strongly oppose it. So they've had to work hard all year to block what the American people clearly want.

They've used procedural tricks in the Senate to prevent action. They've offered their own alternatives that would roll back overtime protection for millions of workers, and hurt low-income families across the country. They've even held the minimum wage hostage unless we all pass a tax giveaway for the wealthiest Americans.

It's unconscionable to play such games with the lives of working families. Minimum wage workers serve in many of the most difficult and most important jobs in our society. They care for children in day care centers, and for the elderly in nursing homes. They clean office buildings, hotel rooms, and restaurants across the country. But the pay they receive doesn't cover their bills.

In this era of skyrocketing costs, these hardworking Americans are forced to make impossible choices—between paying the rent or buying food, between paying the heating bill or paying the doctor. Minimum wage workers today can't afford adequate health care or adequate housing for their families anywhere in the country.

The Republicans continue to treat the minimum wage as a political game, but it's a profoundly moral issue. It's wrong that hard-working men and women cannot afford to put food on the table or heat their homes. It's wrong to give billions and billions of dollars in tax relief to the wealthy, but turn your back on the hard-working families who live in poverty each day and the 14 million children who go to bed hungry each night.

The failure of Congress to act is appalling and the American people are now taking the battle to the states. Six states have minimum wage initiatives on the ballot this fall, and citizens have been pounding the pavements for months in support of these initiatives. I urge each and every voter in Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Montana, Ohio, and Nevada to vote for the minimum wage, and I look forward to helping celebrate six victories in November.

But as important as these successes are, it is not enough. Too many hard-working families are still left out, struggling to make ends meet.

Only a few days are left before Congress adjourns for the election. Members of Congress will earn \$1,900 for working the next three days. It takes a minimum wage worker more than two months to earn that kind of money. The least we in Congress can do during these days is earn our pay by finally

passing a long-overdue increase in the minimum wage. No games, no political tricks. Just a clean vote on a fair raise for hardworking people struggling to survive on the minimum wage. I call on the Republican leadership to give us a clean vote now – or explain to the American people in November why you didn't.

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