

I ask my colleagues to join me and all Americans in honoring SGT Jacob Schmuecker.

REMEMBERING LADY BIRD  
JOHNSON

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, when Lady Bird Johnson passed away on the afternoon of July 11, 2007, the United States mourned the loss of a dignified and compassionate First Lady. Even though she is gone, she has left us with the legacy of her beautification of America. Through her diligent efforts, Mrs. Johnson was not only an advocate for the natural beauty of America but also of the beauty and strength of its people. Sharon and I extend our deepest sympathy to her daughters Lynda and Luci, their families, her friends, and all of those whose lives have been touched by her life's work.

As President Lyndon B. Johnson entered the White House in one of our Nation's most harrowing moments, Mrs. Johnson stood by her husband with poise and courage that helped comfort a wounded nation. Her service to our country would go even further as she became a leading voice for preserving and defending America's natural resources. Here in the Nation's Capital, people can't help but be reminded of Mrs. Johnson's vigorous work to adorn Washington, DC, with flowers, giving us an aesthetic that all Americans could take pride in and enjoy.

I have always shared Mrs. Johnson's deeply held love for the beauty of the United States, from the mountains of West Virginia to the plains of Texas. It was because of her commitment to the environment and the splendor of our country that the Beautification Act of 1965 was passed. She strove to line our highways with wildflowers and still found time to enjoy walking through the national parks that she fought to protect.

In addition to her work with the environment, I truly admire her efforts to address poverty in the United States. Under President Johnson, the VISTA program was enacted, sending out volunteers to improve the conditions of impoverished communities. I can proudly say that as a VISTA volunteer in Emmons, WV, I saw firsthand the immense benefits of this program for participants and for the communities they serve.

I will never forget her devotion to her husband, her family, and her country. I will never forget her passion fighting for civil rights and against poverty. Nor will I ever forget her determination to leave a beautiful America for future generations.

Lady Bird Johnson, again, held my sincerest respect and appreciation. To her family and the people of Texas, I offer my deepest sympathies. Mrs. Johnson was a valuable public servant, an inspiration and a friend. More than anything else, she was an irreplaceable First Lady.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise today to speak on the minimum wage increase, which takes effect today.

Today, millions of hard-working Americans will finally receive the first increase of a \$2.10 raise in the Federal minimum wage. Today, we are putting an end to a decade-long stagnant wage that has kept those who are working their hardest at the bottom of the ladder. Today, they are getting the chance that everyone in this country deserves—the opportunity to build a better life.

Now, \$2.10 may not sound like much to most Americans. But that small increase will make a difference in the pockets and in the lives of millions of Americans. Those \$2.10 add up to more than \$4,400 more every year enough to help a low-income family depending on a minimum wage income to afford 2 years of child care, a year and a half in utility bills, or a year of tuition at a public college.

I am also proud that my State of New Jersey has not waited for Congress to do what is right. Instead, New Jersey has taken it upon itself to increase the State minimum wage far in advance of Congress, which now is at \$7.15 per hour. New Jersey's minimum wage has given more than a quarter million workers the opportunity to build a better life for themselves and their families.

And today, all Americans earning minimum wage will have that same opportunity to build a better life. In enacting the first minimum wage increase in over a decade, Congress took a critical first step towards correcting a grave injustice. For far too long, we have let some of our hardest working employees—those who prepare our food, clean our offices, treat us at the doctor, and guard our buildings at night—see their wages erode by 10 years of inflation.

Ten years is far too long for those who work round the clock, hoping to save a little extra for groceries, for those working so they can buy school supplies or clothes for their children, or for those saving so one day they can live in a place they are proud to call home.

Today, we should also commit that never again will we let this injustice persist for 10 years. The increase going into effect today is an important improvement, but it is not the end of the battle. An increase in the minimum wage is only part of the solution.

We cannot ignore that the income gap has been widening—and now it has taken on a new twist. We no longer have inequality just between those living comfortably and those struggling to make ends meet. Income is now more concentrated at the top than it has been in the past 70 years. In fact, as the wealthiest 1 percent have seen their income grow by 20 percent or more within the past few years, everyone else has seen their income grow by less than 4 percent.

And that inequality is ever too real for women and minorities, who are more likely to be minimum wage earners.

So while increasing the minimum wage is just one step toward closing the income gap, it is an important step.

Ultimately, a wage increase is about fairness, about ensuring all Americans, not just those at the top, can share in the American dream.

Before today, 13 million minimum wage workers did not have the chance to share in that dream.

Before today, 4 million Latinos and African Americans earned less than \$7.25 an hour with no expectation that their wages would rise.

Before today, nearly 7 million women, who make up well over half of minimum wage workers, would not have seen their wages increase.

And before today, a minimum wage earner with a family of three would be making \$6,000 below the poverty level. Before today, that family would not have a way out of poverty and into prosperity.

We have changed the course, not just for minimum wage workers but for our country. We have finally taken steps toward providing greater equality and given our hardest workers and their families the chance to earn a wage of dignity and respect.

A wage increase is only a downpayment on our promise to all Americans—it is a preview of what is to come. Democrats pledge to continue to change the course to ensure all Americans and their families have a fair shot at achieving the American dream.

Thank you. I yield the floor

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

RECOGNIZING IRVIN L. TRUJILLO

• Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I wish to recognize Mr. Irvin L. Trujillo for receiving the National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowship Award. He is one of only 11 artists nationally recognized with this award for his work. The chairman of the NEA, Dana Gioia, will personally deliver the award to Mr. Trujillo this Sunday in Santa Fe. Mr. Trujillo, a Chimayo native, is part of the ever-growing population of talented artists that reside in New Mexico. He is a seventh-generation Chimayo weaver.

Art is such a big part of the New Mexican way of life. Artists from all over the world dream of showcasing their art in one of the many New Mexico Art galleries. Art is a great outlet of creativity and emotion for those who experience its beauty and wonder. Art can take up many avenues; it can be a painting or a piece of pottery, a woven rug or even a photograph. New Mexico is home to many galleries featuring such pieces of art. I am proud to represent a State so full of culture and creativity.