

and keep pushing for commonsense reforms that will actually help people get the care and what they wanted all along, which was better access to quality, affordable health care.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes and that following my remarks Senator FRANKEN be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes and Senator MARKEY be permitted to speak for up to 5 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise this morning to talk about the matter before us, which is the minimum wage. Today the Senate will vote on cloture on the motion to proceed to the Minimum Wage Fairness Act, the legislation we are considering, which would increase the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour over the course of 3 years. We do not know what the result will be today, but we are working to get as much support as possible because getting past this first hurdle, of course, is essential to getting the bill passed, to giving Americans who are working very hard a fair shot at some economic security that they may not have right now.

We have a lot of work to do because there are still people out there—especially here in Washington—who are making arguments that do not make a lot of sense and, to me, do not make a lot of sense to the people of Pennsylvania. Where I came from, when someone works a full day and a full week, they should not—most people believe they should have a fair shot at making not just a living but making sure they have enough of a living that they can lift themselves out of poverty. You should not work 40 hours a week and be paid a poverty wage. Unfortunately, that is the case for far too many Americans.

Increasing the minimum wage would help workers make ends meet, and it would offer a lift up the ladder to the middle class and boost the economy by boosting new spending. We know that is the case. All the data shows that. All the studies show that. But we still have to make the case to some folks here in Washington.

Wages for most workers are not keeping up with the cost of living, the cost

of paying a mortgage and raising a family and some of the other middle-class concerns. The pay for minimum-wage workers is not keeping up with inflation.

Six years have passed since the last minimum wage increase was enacted. Pay for the middle class is stagnant, while the gap between the haves and the have-nots has widened substantially.

The chart on my right tells the story of what could happen if we are able to pass an increase in the minimum wage. It is about giving a fair shot to our families and to our workers by raising the minimum wage. Increasing the minimum wage helps a lot of folks across the country more broadly. Of course, it helps working families.

Look at these numbers. Workers who would get a raise: 27.8 million workers across the country. There are very few things the Senate can do today or this week that would provide that kind of direct economic jump-start to so many communities and to 27.8 million people.

Look at the boost to GDP. I mentioned that earlier—a \$22 billion boost to the economy. Again, there are very few things, if any, we could pass in the Senate that would provide that kind of jump-start to the economy when we need it.

The number of jobs created across the country: some 85,000. Some think the number is higher than that. I know this would have a job-increase impact into the thousands in Pennsylvania.

Look at the number for women. There is mostly an issue about women who are working every day trying to support their families. It also has an impact, obviously, on children. Women who would get a raise: 15.3 million women across the country. I would like to hear someone who is on the other side of the aisle demonstrate to women across this country what they will do in place of that if they are going to say that now is not the time for a raise in the minimum wage. What about those women who are shouldering most of the burden to raise their families and to make their way in a tough economy?

Children with a parent who would get a raise: 14 million children have a parent who would get a boost in the minimum wage. Again, I would say: What is your answer or what is your strategy to give a boost but really, more appropriately stated, a measure of security to our children? I am not sure I can name another action this Senate could take to make sure 14 million children have a measure of security that they do not have today even in an economy that—in some parts of the country—is getting a little better.

Americans overall lifted out of poverty: 2 million Americans will be lifted out of poverty if we pass an increase in the minimum wage.

Again, I would ask anyone on the other side, is there an action, is there a bill, is there a vote, is there a step we can take in the Senate this week or

next week that would do the same to help 14 million children, to lift 2 million Americans out of poverty? I do not know of any. I will wait and see what their answer is. I hope they will answer that question because they should. This is a debate. They should answer that question. Tell us what you will do to help 14 million children if you are not going to support lifting or raising the minimum wage.

Less spending on food stamps: \$4.6 billion per year. We hear attacks all the time—unjustified though they are—from the other side about SNAP. We used to call it the food stamp program. They are always saying: We need to reduce spending in that program. Well, instead of cutting people, as so many in this body seem to want to do every day of the week, voting for budgets that would slash support for people who need help just having a measure of food security, being able to feed their families, instead of doing that, why don't we support raising the minimum wage, lifting them out of poverty, lifting them out of the dependence they have to have on an important program such as SNAP? That is the better way to reduce those numbers. It is not just a question of what is right; it is a question of the best economic strategy for that worker, for his or her family, and for the economy overall.

Finally, veterans who would get a raise: 1 million veterans. We hear speeches all the time here in Washington from both sides of the aisle. In most cases—in almost every case—they are heartfelt and they are honest about the support that one Senator or a group of Senators provide to help our veterans. I have no doubt that people are sincere when they say that. But there are some opportunities around here where you can take action. You can cast a vote that has a direct benefit not just for 14 million children but in this case for 1 million veterans.

You have to ask yourself, if you cannot cast that vote, what are you going to do? What are you going to do with the power you have to cast your vote, to stand and say: I support an increase in the minimum wage. If you are not going to do that, if you are not going to vote for this or ever vote for this, then what are you going to do to help those same 1 million veterans or those same 14 million children or those 15.3 million women? If you have an answer for that, if you have a different strategy that will get us to these numbers, let's hear it. I would like to hear the answer to that. I have not heard it yet. Maybe I have not been listening. But I will try to listen closely to what the arguments are on the other side of the aisle.

So the hashtag #raisethewage is a good way to summarize why this is so fundamental but really so simple. This is about giving people a fair shot. It is not about some program people are asking to be created. It is about basic fairness in giving folks a fair shot in an economy that is still very tough for a lot of families.

I think it is critical that we emphasize some of these numbers, but it is also really about the human trauma so many families have been living through. So many of them have lived through the recession and are still climbing out of the hole they are in. They have lost their jobs; they may have run out of unemployment insurance; they may have lost their homes in the course of all of that. There is no question and it is irrefutable that the cascading effect of that trauma hits not only the worker and maybe, if they have a spouse or a partner, the person standing next to them, but it also has a cascading effect on the children as well and the family and then on all of us.

We all have a stake in this. The idea of raising the minimum wage is about some other group of people out there who are far away from us makes no sense. If we raise the minimum wage, the economy for everyone gets better. Folks don't have to take my word for it. Over 600 economists—600, not 6 or 10 but 600 economists—including 7 Nobel laureates, have signed a letter stating their support for raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 because it would be good for workers and it would not have a negative effect on jobs and would even provide a boost to economic activity.

I am not going to read the whole January letter from the 600 economists, but I will read a statement from it and then I will conclude.

At a time when persistent high unemployment is putting enormous downward pressure on wages, such a minimum-wage increase would provide a much-needed boost to the earnings of low-wage workers.

In recent years there have been important developments in the academic literature on the effect of increases in the minimum wage on unemployment, with the weight of evidence now showing that increases in the minimum wage have had little or no—

Let me say it again, “little or no”—negative effect on the unemployment of minimum-wage workers, even during times of weakness in the labor market. Research suggests that a minimum-wage increase could have a small stimulative effect on the economy as low-wage workers spend their additional earnings, raising demand and job growth, and providing some help on the jobs front.

That is a long statement by 600 economists. It is very measured. It is not inflating numbers and saying this is going to cure all of our economic challenges or all of our economic woes, but it is a clear and unequivocal endorsement of raising the minimum wage. I would add to that, with all due respect to those smart economists, the data on this chart.

Let me make one more point and then I will conclude. I don't have it in front of me, but one of the organizations that has endorsed the increase in the minimum wage is the American Academy of Pediatrics. Why? Because they know a lot about taking care of kids. They know a lot about providing the best health care for kids. They know a lot about the traumas and the

difficulties that a lot of children face, especially if they are poor or if they are in a family getting low wages. That child is impacted. There is no doubt about that. All the science tells us that. All the literature tells us that. But if the American Academy of Pediatrics is saying we should raise the minimum wage because it is good for kids and these 600 economists are saying it is good for the economy and so much other information is saying it will help our veterans, 1 million veterans and 14 million kids, what is the argument on the other side against it?

I have heard some of the arguments, but I have not heard an argument yet that says they have a strategy on the other side of this debate that will help 15.3 million women, that will directly help 14 million children and that will help 1 million veterans and boost our economy on top of it. I would be for this even if there wasn't a boost to the economy because we could help people individually, but that is an added reason to be supportive of this bill.

This is long overdue. We shouldn't be having this debate every 5, 6 or 8 years. We should raise the minimum wage appropriately, to a reasonable number that makes sense, and then index it so we can take this issue off the table, so it would increase appropriately, as it should, over time.

If we had done that in the 1960s or 1970s, the minimum wage would be not just higher than it is today, \$7.25, it would be more than \$10.50 an hour, something higher than that.

If you are unalterably opposed to raising the minimum wage, I would hope you would have a strategy to make sure that 14 million kids are benefited by your action, by your bill—not over 20 years but by some other legislative vehicle—and you should have a strategy to make sure 1 million veterans have some measure of economic security they don't have, and you should be able to answer what the American Academy of Pediatrics said is good for children. If you can answer those kinds of questions, then I would love to take a look at your bill, but if you can't, you have some explaining to do.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HEITKAMP). The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. FRANKEN. I thank my colleague for his words on the minimum wage. There were very important points raised in terms of that letter from those economists and the American Academy of Pediatrics. It adds wonderfully to the debate.

I rise to support, similar to my colleague from Pennsylvania, an increase in the Federal minimum wage. I am a proud cosponsor of the Minimum Wage Fairness Act, which would give 16.5 million Americans a much deserved raise.

I am incredibly proud of the important step Minnesota took to raise the minimum wage earlier this week. Just

a few weeks ago or earlier this month the Governor and the Minnesota State legislature took this big step for workers and families. Because of this, hundreds of thousands of hard-working Minnesotans will themselves receive a raise.

This is a big deal. Before this increase, the Minnesota State minimum wage was actually lower than the Federal minimum wage.

I would like to talk a little bit about why Minnesota has taken this important step. Minnesotans believe that if someone works full time, 52 weeks a year, they should be able to put food on the table and a roof over their family's head. They believe that if someone works in America, they should have a chance to work their way up into the middle class. As I have traveled around Minnesota, I have heard from people all over the State who have been working long hours and yet still struggle to support their families, to work their way to the middle class and provide a brighter future for their children.

As a State, we recognized that there were too many people working very hard at one, two, and sometimes three jobs and were still struggling to get by. Parents have been wondering how they are going to be able to pay for their kids' college or even how to make the next car payment. Instead, they have been working 60-hour weeks and missing out on spending precious time with their children.

That is why I am proud that Minnesota has now joined 21 other States with minimum wages higher than the Federal minimum. In Washington, I am going to keep doing my part to help Minnesota workers.

Recent research confirms that what we see in Minnesota is happening across America. In a survey last year of workers earning less than \$10 an hour, two-thirds of these workers said they are not meeting or are just meeting their basic living expenses. Two-thirds of these workers report needing public assistance. Two in five said they can't afford additional education and training. With wages too low, these workers are trapped. They are trapped in poverty.

The economy is getting better, but raising the minimum wage is about doing everything we can to make sure it gets better for everyone. Last year our Nation's largest businesses saw record profits. The market finished last year up over 26 percent, its best return since the 1990s. Raising the minimum wage is about making sure Minnesotans and workers across the country get to be a part of this improving economy.

That is why Minnesota has taken this important step. We know a strong minimum wage and a strong middle class go hand in hand. That is why I support raising the Federal minimum wage to a level that allows people to work their way to a better life.

For decades the Federal minimum wage has lost its value. If the Federal

minimum wage had kept pace with inflation since its peak value in the 1960s, today it would be worth over \$10.50 an hour. Today the Federal minimum wage is just \$7.25 an hour.

When families have had to pay more for food, rent, utilities, childcare, and education, the minimum wage not only hasn't kept up, it has gone down. It is not only minimum wage workers who haven't seen an increase in wages. Since the 1970s we have seen worker productivity grow by 135 percent while the average wages for middle-class workers have not changed. Americans are working harder than ever but average wages are stuck and the minimum wage actually has been declining.

Let me tell you about what raising the minimum wage would mean to one Minnesotan. Her name is Misrak. She is the mother of two and works at the airport as a cleaner, where she makes a low wage. Because she couldn't make ends meet, she had to take a second job assisting passengers in wheelchairs who need help. She has been doing this for 4 years, and during that time she has received only one raise worth just 80 cents an hour. She doesn't get vacation days or sick days or time off with her children. She wants to help her children finish college, and they want to finish college so they can be sure that if they work hard, that will be a path out of poverty and into the middle class. For Misrak, even though she works over 60 hours per week, she and her family are just barely scraping by.

Bringing the minimum wage back to a level that can support a family is the first step in restoring the promise that if someone works hard, they can build a better life for themselves and their family. Sometimes people ask why raise the minimum wage to \$9.50 an hour as we did in Minnesota or \$10.10 as we want to do. They say why not leave minimum wage workers alone to figure out things for themselves.

I don't believe raising the minimum wage is going to solve all the problems working families face. They need more than a minimum wage. They need good jobs, good schools, and good roads to provide a better future for themselves and for their children, but I support raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour because it is a wage that says Americans value work. It is a minimum guarantee that anyone who shows up 40 hours a week and ready to work should be able to provide food and shelter for themselves and their children and should not live in poverty.

Other people say we don't need to raise the minimum wage because it is not working families who earn the minimum wage. Instead they say it is mainly teenagers in their first job who earn the minimum wage. In fact, the vast majority of workers who would get a raise under this bill are working adults, including approximately 350,000 adults in Minnesota. One-quarter are parents, including over 85,000 parents in our State. Parents who would see a raise from the bill we are considering

are the parents of 14 million children, an estimated 150,000 of them in Minnesota. These are kids. The American Academy of Pediatrics says do this. We know that kids who have deprivation have trauma. There are different kinds of deprivation, and we know it makes it harder for them to learn. It changes their brain chemistry to be under that much stress, so let's do it for these kids.

The majority—56 percent—of Minnesotans who would be affected by an increase are women. Nationwide, one in five working mothers would see a raise under this bill, and 6.8 million workers and their families would be lifted out of poverty.

Raising the minimum wage is good for working families and it is good for the economy. It boosts economic activity and helps local businesses. A study from the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago found that increasing the Federal minimum wage to \$10 an hour could boost GDP by up to 0.3 percentage points. In a recent analysis of State employment data, Goldman Sachs noted that based on their analysis of States that increased their minimum wage at the start of 2014, the employment impact, if any, from a higher Federal minimum wage would be small relative to the normal volatility in the market. A higher minimum wage—

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent for an additional 2 minutes or 1½ minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. FRANKEN. In that case, 2 minutes.

A higher minimum wage also helps our economy because increasing the minimum wage boosts the purchasing power of consumers and creates more customers for local businesses. People earning minimum wage spend the money they are earning. The Economic Policy Institute estimates that the increased economic activity from an increase to \$10.10 could create 85,000 new jobs and boost GDP by \$22.2 billion over the 3 years of implementation. Increasing the minimum wage helps businesses in another way too. Workers who are better paid are also more productive and less likely to quit. That means businesses save on recruiting and training costs. It also means they have better, more loyal, and harder working employees.

Businesses in Minnesota understand this. I spoke with Danny Schwartzman, the owner of Common Roots Cafe and Catering in Minneapolis. Danny pays his employees a minimum of \$11 per hour, plus benefits, such as paid time off and health insurance. Danny has written:

Over time, other businesses will see what I have seen—that paying people more yields more for the bottom line. It's easier to recruit and retain people. Happier employees are more likely to provide better customer service. Lower turnover means dramatically lower training costs and better employee performance.

Danny understands that his business will do better if his workers are doing better.

It is time that Congress follow Minnesota's example. The minimum wage is about making sure that work pays. It is about the American dream. If you work hard and take responsibility, you can put a roof over your head, provide a decent life for your children, and help them get ready for the future. It has been too long since the Federal minimum wage kept that promise to America's workers and their children, and that is why we need to raise it today.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. MARKEY. Madam President, I am proud to stand here today to support raising the minimum wage. No person in America should work full time and not earn enough to be above the poverty level. The poverty level in the United States in 2014 is about \$23,000 for a family of four. Today, if someone works under the minimum wage for 40 hours a week they are still in poverty. No one should work 40 hours a week and be given a salary that does not lift them and their families out of poverty. That is absolutely wrong.

Millions of people in our country have been trying to climb into the middle class. But no matter how hard they work, they are stuck in the same place.

In America today, nearly half of those who grow up in families in the bottom fifth of income earners will stay there as adults. Tens of millions of Americans labor tirelessly for years to scale the economic ladder but they can never get off the ground. That is unacceptable, it is immoral, and that needs to change.

Raising the minimum wage is a first step to fighting income inequality in our country. We must help restore the dignity and the value of work and help millions of families escape poverty by increasing the national minimum wage.

Today, more than 46 million Americans are living in poverty. The average American household made less in 2012 than it did in 1989. That is wrong. It is plain wrong. Over these last 20 years, the top 1 percent of wage earners in America has seen their income skyrocket by 86 percent. In the years ahead it is going to get worse for those making the minimum wage. Over the next 5 years the real value of the minimum wage is projected to decline by 10 percent or over \$1,400 of purchasing power for a full-time worker, unless we increase the minimum wage.

What does that mean? It means Americans will be able to buy less if we don't do it, and it will be harder for families to get by. The poor will effectively get even more impoverished. Even as they are working 40 hours a week, they get poorer and poorer and poorer because that minimum wage does not buy as much as it did the year

before and the year before and the year before. So the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. That is the system we have right now unless we take action to make sure those who earn the minimum wage are keeping pace with what it takes to buy the food, to pay the rent, to pay for the schools for the children in their family. If we don't do this, they get poorer and poorer while continuing to work 40 hours a week.

We know low-income Americans would benefit from raising the minimum wage, but they are not the only ones. Hundreds of small businesses in my home State of Massachusetts have signed on to a petition for a fair minimum wage of \$10.50 per hour. That petition says that raising the minimum wage makes good business sense. That same small business petition says workers are also customers.

They are right. Increasing the purchasing power of minimum-wage workers helps stimulate the economy. Research has shown time and time again that minimum-wage workers spend the additional income they receive when the minimum wage is increased. If we increase the minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour, 28 million workers would receive about \$35 billion in additional wages.

Raising the minimum wage does not cause job losses, even during periods of recession. Most minimum-wage workers need the income to make ends meet and spend it quickly. It goes right into the economy. So economists believe it will actually boost the economy by creating about 85,000 new jobs and increasing economic activity by about \$22 billion. That means everyone in our economy should be on board.

Raising the minimum wage is about giving families security, opportunity, and dignity—the security to know they can make ends meet, the opportunity to climb out of poverty and into the middle class, and the dignity to know they are getting paid a fair wage for a hard day's work. That is why I am proud to stand here today to urge my colleagues to increase the minimum wage so that we give America the raise it needs for those who are working so hard for our economy.

I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

MINIMUM WAGE FAIRNESS ACT—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 12 noon will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

The minority whip.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I think people listening to the debate on the minimum wage issue may be a little bit confused, because we all want to

see hard-working American families work their way toward the American dream, but we are not going to be able to do that with the Federal Government setting wages for restaurants, small businesses, and other people across the country.

I have no objection, obviously, if Massachusetts or Minnesota or some other State wants to raise the minimum wage. That is their choice. But what my colleagues are now asking for is the Federal Government, or the Nation, to set a minimum wage at a level which will destroy between 1/2 and 1 million jobs. That is not just me talking, that is the Congressional Budget Office, which is the official scorecard for the Congress.

Think about this: You are a small business and your biggest expense is wages for the people who work there. Now the Federal Government comes in and says: Forget about your local conditions in North Dakota or in Texas. We are going to say, from Washington, DC, that everybody has to raise wages by 40 percent. I can't imagine there will be many businesses, small businesses in particular, that can absorb a 40-percent increase in their overhead.

This is going to hurt low-wage earners who are currently employed. That is what the Congressional Budget Office has said. And it is going to hurt the economy.

I heard the distinguished Senator from Minnesota say the economy is doing great. Well, I guess he must have missed the latest report on the first quarter of 2014. Because of the bad weather—we had an unseasonably cold first quarter—the economy grew at .1 percent. In other words, it almost went into what would be a negative growth or a recession. Of course, recession is defined as two quarters of negative growth, but my point is this strong growth he is talking about in the economy is a figment, it is not the fact, and we need to deal with the facts on the ground.

I wonder sometimes why public opinion holds Congress and Washington in such low esteem. Actually, I don't wonder why. My conclusion is they think we are out of touch. We are out of touch with regular American families—people who are working hard to make ends meet, getting the kids ready for school and living their version of the American dream. The latest statistic I saw says that 27 percent of the American people think we are on the right track. That is a shocking number. That means 73 percent think we are on the wrong track.

What is the old saying, that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different outcome? Well, let's not do the same thing over and over again—keep America on the wrong track and engage in a policy decision here on this minimum wage, this 40-percent increase in the minimum wage, which will actually hurt more people than it helps.

This is not just my view. There was a poll that came out yesterday which said, basically, once people understood that people would be put out of work by increasing the minimum wage, 58 percent said it is not worth it. So 58 percent of the respondents said it is not worth it.

You know, it would be nice—it would be great—if we lived in a world where Washington could dictate what wages will be and all of a sudden peace, love, and happiness would break out—the age of Aquarius—because Washington is somehow distributing free money that didn't come from somewhere, that didn't come out of somebody's pocket or as part of someone's overhead or it didn't have any negative impact. But that is not the world we live in.

Again, this is not just public opinion, it is not just my opinion, it is not just the opinion of the Congressional Budget Office about the job-killing nature of this dramatic 40-percent increase proposed in the minimum wage. Back in 1998, President Clinton's economic adviser Gene Sperling—who just left the Obama administration—wrote a memo to President Clinton when a similar proposal was being made to raise the minimum wage 41 percent at that time. The Harkin bill we will vote on here shortly proposes to raise the minimum wage 40 percent. This was back in 1998 that Gene Sperling is writing to President Clinton on a proposed increase of the minimum wage by 41 percent, but for all practical purposes it is the same sort of proposal. This is what Mr. Sperling wrote to President Clinton:

Your entire economic team believes that this approach is too aggressive and are concerned that Senator Kennedy's proposal could prove damaging to the employment prospects of low-skilled workers . . .

This was Senator Ted Kennedy's proposal back in 1998. Again, that is what the Congressional Budget Office has said about this bill. He goes on to say, "as well as to the general macroeconomic performance of the economy."

So what are our friends across the aisle proposing we do when the economy grew at .1 percent this last quarter? Well, administer a body blow to this anemic economic growth. And this is not just my opinion. It is *deja vu* all over again, as they say. I guess if you are around Washington long enough, you are going to see this movie replayed over and over.

The fact is that our economy is weaker today than it was in 1998. Sure, unemployment is coming down slowly, but the economy is growing too slowly and the number of people in the workforce is the lowest it has been for the last 30 years, the so-called labor participation rate.

So what did President Clinton do when his economic advisers said: Don't do it, Mr. President. While it is good politics, perhaps, it really will hurt the economy, and it will put people out of work.