

In 1882, the first Labor Day festivities celebrated the creation of the labor movement and the social and economic achievements of the American worker.

For the next few years, as the growth of labor organizations spread, the unofficial holiday continued and took root across the country. Finally, on June 28, 1894, Congress passed legislation to honor the contributions and achievements of America's workers and made the first Monday of every September a federal holiday – Labor Day. We have since taken this day to pay tribute to the contributions workers have made to the prosperity of our nation.

This Labor Day, it is time to honor some of our hardest workers—those earning the minimum wage—by giving them a long overdue raise. Nearly 7 million Americans - most of them adults, many of them working full-time and responsible for providing for their families - would benefit from an increase in the minimum wage. These workers play by the rules and go to work every day. And they have a right to a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. An American who works 40 hours a week earns only \$10,712 annually—well below the federal poverty line for a family of four. No one working full-time in America should be relegated to poverty.

While gas prices, healthcare costs, and college tuition have continued to skyrocket, the federal minimum wage has remained stagnant for nearly a decade. New findings from the Center for Economic and Policy Research show that the minimum wage is now at its lowest level in 50 years. Because of inflation, the failure to increase the minimum wage is not just a pay freeze, but a pay-cut. If the minimum wage in 2006 was worth what it was in 1968, it would be \$9.05 an hour -- not \$5.15.

In Maryland, we were fortunate that the Legislature overrode Governor Ehrlich's veto earlier this year—effectively raising our state's minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.15 an hour. Still, we can do better. Raising the federal minimum wage to \$7.25 will give 84,000 Marylanders a boost in pay and help them put food on the table for their families.

On Tuesday, the U.S. Census Bureau released its newest economic data. The report confirms what I have long been saying: that the Republican economic agenda bolsters the very wealthy while leaving average working class families to fend for themselves. Look no further than House Republicans' cynical attempt to combine an increase in the minimum wage with an estate tax cut that will benefit the heirs of the wealthiest estates in America and drive our nation hundreds of billions of dollars further into debt.

Reward Work-Raise the Minimum Wage

September 02, 2006

Now, 86 percent of Americans now support raising the minimum wage. In the richest country on the face of the earth, it is simply unconscionable that hardworking Americans are living in poverty. If Democrats win control of the House, the first thing we will do is pass a reasonable increase to the minimum wage.

As we celebrate Labor Day, America needs a new direction—one that rewards work, not just wealth.