

## Minimum Wage Increase in the First Hundred Hours

**Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky**

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Nearly 15 million Americans go to their jobs every day caring for our children and frail old people, cleaning other people's mess, serving us food in restaurants, and for their efforts receive \$5.15 an hour, the Federal minimum wage. If they work 52 forty-hour weeks, their annual income adds up to \$10,712 -- \$4,367 under the poverty level for a family of three.

Other Americans -- the CEOs of the nation's top companies, those with \$1 billion or more in annual revenues -- made on average \$10,712 by 11:02 a.m. on January 2, 2007, the first workday of new year. According to a report by Americans United for Change, those CEOs make \$5,279 an hour, \$10,982,000 a year, or 1,025 times more than their minimum wage employees.

One hundred other Americans, the CEOs of the Fortune 100 companies, rake in an average of \$8,461 per hour or \$17.6 million per year, a cool 1,643 times more than their minimum wage employees. Those CEOs must really be special compared to the woman who changes their mothers' diapers or cleans their toilets.

Democrats have pledged to raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 per hour to \$7.25 over the next two years. It's hard to imagine any member of Congress objecting. After all, it's been ten years, the longest span ever, since the minimum wage was raised. In that time, we members of Congress have received cost-of-living increases that have raised our salaries over \$30,000. And, by the way, Congress was in session a grand total of 103 days in 2006.

In the end, we will pass the minimum wage increase in the House within the first hundred hours of the 110th Congress. But not before we hear President Bush whine that such a raise must be attached to a tax break for business, or Republicans again demand on simultaneously eliminating the inheritance tax -- a break that almost exclusively helps Paris Hilton and other mega-millionaires.

But that's OK. A *Newsweek* poll found that 68% of Americans believed "increasing the minimum wage" should be one of the top priorities for the new Democratic Congress over the next two years. We need to do this for the 15 million minimum wage workers and their 7 million children. And we need to do it as a down-payment on our commitment to assure that every hardworking American receives a living wage.