

ORAL CONCOURS 2015

ANGLAIS - LVII

The US minimum wage must increase

So there they were in Durham and Raleigh in the rain this week, workers, many with their families, demonstrating in favor of an increase in the federal minimum wage.

How easy it is for the senators and House members in Washington to dismiss them, to talk about the minimum wage with tired old logic about how boosting it too much, from the current \$7.25 an hour, would just be too risky for the economy. It would hurt the small-business person, don't you know. Can't afford it. Got to keep the economy moving. Can't have people lazing around living big on \$8 an hour, for goodness' sake.

Yes, how easy it is for these public servants, who get six-figure salaries and cushy retirements all on the government to tell some of America's hardest-working people that they'll just have to suck it up.

They've been telling them that for years. The minimum wage was last increased in 2009 as the last step of a three-step increase approved by Congress in 2007. Before 2007, the minimum wage hadn't changed in 10 years.

Now, thankfully, some corporations are seeing the light. Wal-Mart, the largest private employer in the United States, has announced it's going to raise the wages of 500,000 people. McDonald's is going \$1 an hour over local minimum wages. Recently, as noted on this page, some restaurants in the Triangle are going over the minimum wage, some substantially.

Because here's something Republicans in Washington don't seem to understand: A rising tide really does lift all boats. If the minimum wage were higher, those workers would have money to engage in a little commerce with other businesses. A goodly portion of the nation's economy would benefit. And families would be able to do more for their children.

That's a dream, the American Dream, that most members of Congress mentioned at one time or another in their campaigns for office.

Consider one of the people who protested in the rain last week in Raleigh, a woman supporting three children with a minimum-wage job at a fast-food restaurant. "Right now," she said, "I have to budget my money and choose which bill I'm going to pay. My kids need new clothes. I'm not able to get those. They want to go on trips or to the circus, but I can't take them for lack of money."

Then there are those workers who in their budgets have to figure in medicine and how they can survive taking half-doses of blood pressure pills or diabetes medication because they can't afford the whole prescription.

Some of those conservatives in Congress would say, "Get a job." But these people have jobs – jobs businesses need. They're working. Hard. But many have to get food stamps, and absent health insurance, get their health care the only way they can, at emergency rooms.

The minimum wage ought to be called the starvation wage. It should be no less than \$10 and preferably \$15 an hour. The tide must rise under all.