



Da DAWG says...

Raising the Minimum Wage is a Moral Issue

Rick Wilson—AFSC-WVEJP

Wage battle begins again. A national campaign has begun to urge Congress to raise the minimum wage. Meanwhile, 17 states and the District of Columbia have already enacted their own minimum wage increases. Campaigns are active in at least eight other states to raise the state wage *and* support an increase at the federal level.

Prophetic inspiration. Drawing on the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and other holy books, many faith communities and faith based organizations have joined with community and labor organizations to support these efforts. We believe that justice for low wage workers isn't just an economic or political issue; it's a religious and moral issue as well.

The connection with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It is fitting that we use the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday weekend and beyond to raise this issue. Dr. King was an eloquent and effective voice for economic justice for all people. "There is nothing but a lack of social vision to prevent us from paying an adequate wage to every American whether he is a hospital worker, laundry worker, maid or day laborer," he said. In a very real sense, Dr. King gave his life to the struggle of workers for a living wage. His last journey to Memphis was in support of the struggle of striking sanitation workers.

An increase is past due. A raise in the minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour is long overdue. The last increase was more than eight years ago, in 1997. Since then, it has lost nearly one fifth of its value. In terms of real purchasing power, the minimum wage is lower than it was in 1950 and far lower than it was in 1968, the year Dr. King was killed. A fulltime minimum wage worker earns only \$10,712 per year — more than \$2,000 below the inadequate official poverty line for a family of two, and below what studies show even a single worker needs for housing, food, health care, and other necessities. Meanwhile, Con-

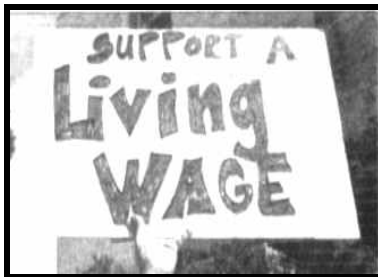
gress has raised its own pay eight times since 1997.

Good policy and good politics. Over several years, a number of public opinion polls have shown that more than 80% of the population supports raising the minimum wage.

Many would benefit. The declining value of the minimum wage has contributed to the rise in the U. S. poverty rate, which is now higher than it was in the 1970s. According to the Census Bureau, around 37 million men, women, and children in our nation live below the official poverty rate, which understates the real extent of poverty. In 2003, nearly one in three children living below the poverty line lived in families where someone worked full-time year round.

One proposal, the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2005, would have raised the minimum wage to \$7.25 over two years. According to the Economic Policy Institute, that increase would benefit nearly 7.5 million workers, the great majority of them adults. Millions more would benefit indirectly as wage scales were adjusted above that level to reflect the new minimum. Although Congress failed to pass that bill, a similar bill is likely to be voted on again this year.

No evidence of job loss. Opponents of raising the minimum wage cite the possibility of job loss but the evidence does not back up this claim. In fact, according to a 2000 report by the National Economic Council, the U.S. economy and labor markets performed strongly after the last minimum wage increase, in 1996-97. "Between September 1996 and February 2000," the report notes, "10.2 million jobs were created...even stronger growth than in the previous two years. In retail trade, which has a large concentration of minimum wage workers, there were 1.4 million new jobs." Unemploy-



(Continued on page 2)

Action Alert*(Continued from page 1)*

ment rates reached their lowest levels since 1969. Unemployment went down across the country – including among people of color, teenagers, and high school graduates with no college, groups that opponents claimed would be especially harmed by such an increase.

The economy gains when working people have more money to spend. Higher wages increase consumer purchasing power, which increases sales. In the words of Joel Marks, national director of the American Small Business Alliance, “Fair wages are good for business.” Studies by the Fiscal Policy Institute and others have shown that states with higher minimum wages have had better employment trends than other states, including for retail businesses and small businesses. The Economic Policy Institute reports that employers are able to absorb wage increases through “higher productivity, lower recruiting and training costs, decreased absenteeism, and increased worker morale.”

We need a responsible approach. Creating a prosperous community for the future requires responsible planning and action today. When one part of our community suffers, it weighs us all down and lowers our shared standard of living. Low wages undermine the tax base of local communities, leading to reduced public services from schools to road repairs. As a nation, we need to get off the low road to economic and social decline and get on the high road to good paying jobs and strong communities. Raising the minimum wage is an important step in that direction.

The bottom line:

A job should keep you out of poverty,
not keep you in it.

For more information you can contact the DAWG office or Rick Wilson at rwilson@afsc.org for a copy of “A Just Minimum Wage: Good for Workers, Business and our Future” by Holly Sklar and the Rev. Dr. Paul H. Sherry. Produced by the American Friends Service Committee and the National Council of Churches USA in support of the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign.

Or you can visit www.saveourservices.org to download your free copy. You can also visit

WWW.LETJUSTICEROLL.ORG

TAKE ACTION ON MINIMUM WAGE

There are currently two bills in the WV Legislature that would raise the state minimum wage. Senate Bill 146 and House Bill 4023 once passed will raise

the minimum wage from \$5.15 / hour to \$5.85 by June 30, 2006; to \$6.55 by June 30, 2007; and to \$7.25 by June 30, 2008.

Currently minimum wage workers who work a full 40 hours a week only make \$10,700 a year. The federal poverty level for a family of 4 is \$19,350. That means hard working families aren't even making enough money to be considered poor by the federal definition.

Raising the minimum wage benefits families *and* the economy. After the last raise in 1997, the country saw an increase in more than 3 million non-farm jobs, the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years and a 3.8% increase in the gross domestic product. It is a fact that low wage workers spend a higher percentage of their income in local communities, so by providing workers with a higher rate of pay it will in turn increase local economies.

Seventeen other states and the District of Columbia have taken action to increase minimum wage and have experienced no adverse economic impact. Similar legislation is also being considered in many other states.

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!!!

Contact your representatives and let them know how you feel about raising the state minimum wage. Tell them how raising the minimum wage will effect your family.

You can call toll free 1-877-565-3447 to leave a message or be transferred to your legislator's office.

You can email your legislator from the Legislative Action Center on Children and Families at <http://www.capwiz.com/preventchildabusewv/> Click on the *Raise the Minimum Wage* alert and follow the instructions. Its easy to use.



Did you know that West Virginia's working families and ultimately our state's economy miss out on millions of dollars each year? According to the US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), 43,540 West Virginians in 2003 may have been eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) credit but failed to claim it on their federal tax returns. As a result, West Virginia working families and our state's economy missed out on an estimated \$73 million.

If you worked in 2005 and you are eligible, you may receive:

- \$ up to \$4,400 if you have two or more children and earned less than \$35,263 (or less than \$37,263 for married workers); or
- \$ up to \$2,662 if you have one child and earned less than \$31,030 (or less than \$33,030 for married workers); or
- \$ up to \$399 if you have no children, earned less than \$11,750 (or less than \$13,750 for married workers) and are between the ages of 25 and 65.

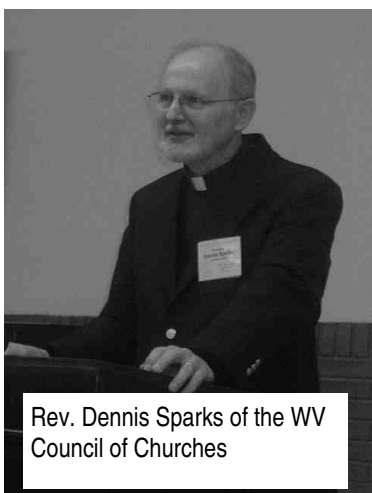
The IRS, AARP and the WV Welfare Reform Coalition continually work to establish VITA sites in all of West Virginia's 55 counties. These are **FREE** tax assistance sites in churches, libraries, shopping malls, community colleges, and public sites from January through April 15. To find a VITA site near you, **call 1-866-WVA-EITC or visit www.wveitc.com** where you can find answers to all your questions.

Don't spend your hard earned money on rapid refunds or paid tax preparations! Bring as much money back into your family as possible this year with this important process. You can also call Evelyn Dortch at DAWG for more details on EITC!

~Elizabeth Damewood, WV Welfare Reform Coalition



DAWG a Co-Sponsor of the Martin Luther King Day Living Wage Breakfast



Rev. Dennis Sparks of the WV Council of Churches

"There is nothing but a lack of vision to prevent us from paying an adequate wage to every American, whether he is a hospital worker, laundry worker, or day laborer."

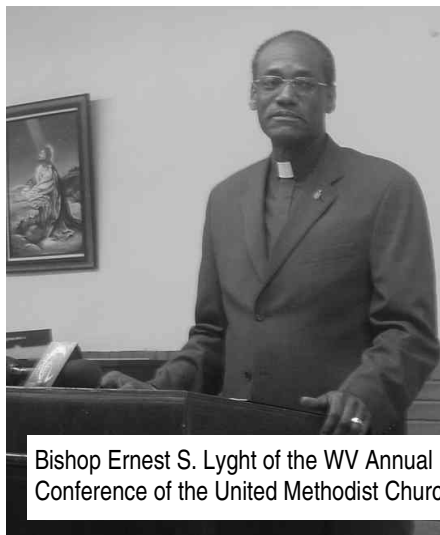
~ Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Tierra Williams
DAWG member.



Jill Woodrum and Sharron Witherspoon of DAWG



Bishop Ernest S. Lyght of the WV Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church



Rick Wilson of AFSC-WVEJC

House Cuts \$38.8 Billion from Budget; Slashes Health Care, Student Loans, Child Support and Help for People with Disabilities

From Coalition on Human Needs Report (2/3/06)

By a vote of 216 to 214, the House of Representatives passed a bill that cut \$38.8 billion from the federal budget on Wednesday, February 1. The pain of the cuts will be overwhelmingly borne by moderate- and low-income students, families, the elderly, abused and neglected children, and people with disabilities. All Democrats, one Independent and 13 Republicans voted against S. 1932. *Note: Rep. Shelley Moore Capito voted for this.*

Advocacy Efforts Paid Off

The vote came after months of intense lobbying and education work by advocates, service providers, students and others who decried the deep cuts and restrictive policy changes to Medicaid, student aid, child care, child support enforcement, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for people with disabilities and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). More than 300 events in districts around the country were sponsored by the coordinated efforts of the Emergency Campaign for America's Priorities in the month of January alone. Members of the House of Representatives were bombarded with hundreds of thousands of calls from citizens over the last four months. Hundreds of groups around the country demanded – and got – meetings with their representatives to explain the harm the bill will cause to their communities.

These efforts were instrumental in persuading four Republican members who voted for the bill on December 19 to change their vote to “no.” The four members were Representatives Rob Simmons (R-CT), Jim Gerlach (R-PA), John Sweeney (R-NY), and Jim Ramstad (R-MN). Rep. Steve Buyer (R-IN) voted no in December but voted in favor of the bill on Wednesday. Two Republicans and one Democrat were absent.

The House approved a very similar version of the 774-page bill in the early morning of December 19 by

a vote of 212 to 206 after having just hours to re-view it. Later that week the Senate approved the bill with minor changes. That action sent the bill back to the House. Because members of Congress had recessed for the year, opponents of the bill used the month of January to draw attention to egregious provisions that had been overlooked. Although the legislation's passage remains deeply disappointing to human needs advocates, the final bill reflects major improvements from the President's original proposals and earlier Congressional versions. The bill does not include any cuts to food stamps or the President's plan for a

“superwaiver” which would have given states wide permission to waive rules and regulations for a variety of low-income services. The President had proposed at least \$45 billion in cuts to Medicaid.

Bill Does Not Reduce Deficit Conservatives claim S. 1932 was a necessary step to reining in out-of-control spending. But the misnamed Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 will actually *increase* the deficit because it is merely one half of a two-part package. The second part of the package – a tax

reconciliation bill – reduces taxes (mostly for the well-off) by \$70 billion. (See story below.) Coupled together, the budget cut bill and the tax cut bill will increase the deficit by more than \$30 billion. In fact, Congress did not pass S. 1932 to cut government spending, but to help pay for (offset) additional new tax breaks.

Special Interests Win Out Over Ordinary Families

The final bill reflects the choice of Congress to protect special interests and big donors over families. Pressure from the managed care and pharmaceuti-



DAWG members join others at prayer vigils and actions to fight the budget cuts.



(Continued on page 6)

Making Connections Trainings

Elizabeth Damewood—WV Welfare Reform Coalition

Making Connections trainings are great opportunities to find out more about programs and services in West Virginia that support the transition from public assistance to self-sufficiency. Participants receive a comprehensive, easy to use training manual that addresses health, education, WV WORKS and benefits, supports and advocacy.

All Making Connections trainings are a collaborative effort of the WVWRC, American Friends Service Committee, Legal Aid of WV and DAWG.

Trainings are available statewide and can be especially designed for different audiences.

Outreach Workers—For more details on setting up a Making Connections training specifically for outreach workers you can contact

Elizabeth Damewood, WVWRC (304)342-6972.

Low-Income —If you are interested in setting up a training for low-income individuals or families contact **Evelyn Dortch, DAWG (304)347-9222.** Trainings are provided free of charge to low income people thanks to DAWG's great funders and generous donors.



DAWG goes to Wheeling for Making Connections Training



Accessing Education Workshop

- ✓ Do you want to go to college or get more training?
- ✓ Do you want to have a better job and make more money?
- ✓ Do you need information on scholarships and financial aid for non-traditional students?

This **free** workshop is for you. This informational workshop is designed for low-income adults who are interested in attending college or vocational training. This workshop will

explain how to access money to pay for education and training, what resources are available, and how to access them.

This free 2 hour workshop is presented by Direct Action Welfare Group and American Friends Service Committee—WV Economic Justice Project. Our first such workshop was held in Jan. 2006 in Charleston. If you are interested in setting up a workshop in your area please contact **Evelyn Dortch at DAWG (304) 347-9222 or evelyn@wvdawg.org**

Commission on Religion in Appalachia Annual Assembly of the Appalachian Development Projects



DAWG is proud to be one of the Appalachian Development Projects that is supported by the Commission on Religion in Appala-

chia. As one of these funded projects we were able to participate in the annual gathering of all the projects to share information and to learn from each other. DAWG sent two representatives to attend, Jill Woodrum and a Teen DAWG representative, Chris Dortch.



For more information on the Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA) or the Appalachian Development Project please visit their website at

<http://www.geocities.com/appalcora/index.html>

Federal Budget Battle Cont'd from page 4

cal industries persuaded conference negotiators to drop provisions that would have saved money from Medicaid and Medicare programs – and instead placed the burden on low-income beneficiaries. The bill subjects students and parents to higher-than-market interest rates, with the federal government capturing the overpayments back from the lenders. Education and Workforce Committee Chairman John Boehner reassured banks that he would take care of them in the bill – which he did.

Medicaid: The bill cuts Medicaid by \$27 billion over ten years by allowing states to reduce benefits and require poor mothers and children to pay more for their health care. Nearly all the 28 million children who now benefit from Medicaid may lose services and/or pay more than their families can afford. Comprehensive care that now effectively prevents and treats child health problems would no longer be assured, even for the poorest children, and many deserving elderly who have no options other than nursing home care will not be able to afford it.

Child Support: Despite the success in the last decade of improving child support enforcement and collecting more payments owed to children, the budget bill cuts federal funding of enforcement activities by \$4.9 billion over 10 years. **As a result of this cut, at least \$8.4 billion of child support will go uncollected.**

Student Loans: The bill cuts \$12.7 billion from student loan programs over five years. Up to 70 percent of the total cuts from education would directly affect student borrowers. **College students will face higher fees and interest rates.** Parent borrowers will also be charged higher interest rates.

Aid to Disabled: The bill cuts \$425 million from cash aid for poor people with disabilities. Approving applications for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for poor people with disabilities can take many months. Instead of receiving a lump sum payment for the benefits owed from the date of application, poor beneficiaries will have to wait much longer to collect what they are owed. In part, these provisions “save” money because some seriously disabled people will die before they receive their full benefits – a true death tax.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Child Care: The bill reauthorizes the welfare-to-

work program through 2010 and reduces some flexibility states now have in implementing their programs. The bill requires most states to make hasty increases in work participation -- or face steep penalties. California's Legislative Analyst's Office has estimated that California will have to pay \$445 million in penalties in 2009 and 2010, as the harsher provisions are implemented. **On average, states will have to increase the number of families participating in work activities by 69 percent – an additional 236,000 families, with very little planning time and few resources.** The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that the cost to states of meeting the new welfare to work requirements is \$8.4 billion over 5 years. (Center for Law and Social Policy, http://www.clasp.org/publications/tanfagreement_update_jan12.pdf .) The small increase in child care funding (\$200 million a year) is inadequate to cover the increased work demanded of parents. **Funding for child care is estimated to be so inadequate that 255,000 fewer children in working families will receive child care assistance in 2010 than in 2004.**

Foster Care: The budget bill would reduce assistance to abused and neglected children by almost \$1.3 billion over 10 years (\$577 million over 5 years). This includes certain reductions to all states and specific cuts to services and benefits for relative caregivers in nine western states. Both cuts will limit access to foster care assistance by grandparents or other relatives. The bill restricts case management and planning to arrange for appropriate medical, mental health, educational, and other services. Although the bill includes some increases in child welfare spending, these are very small, and are far outweighed by these cuts.



Rev. Jim Lewis introducing Evelyn Dortch, DAWG Executive Director at a Town Hall Meeting at University of Charleston sponsored by FACES on Medicaid.



Evelyn Dortch talks with DAWG member Marcus Boyd. Marcus was the only family representative to join the panel.

Teen DAWG News



Teen Xpo—Teen DAWG has been working with the Regional Family Resource Network on

the Teen Xpo for Kanawha and Putnam Counties. The Xpo is going to be April 29 at the Nitro Community Center. Middle schools students are invited to attend between 2 and 5pm and high school students are invited to attend from 7 to 10pm. It should be really cool with lots of stuff to do and cool live bands. For more info on the Teen Xpo you can email Michele Baranaskas at executivedirector@regionalfnrn.org

more teen friendly this year so it should be really fun. One of the big things we are doing is designing our own workshops and picking the adults that will work with the teens run the workshops. Teens we will be in charge of the meetings and we are setting the rules. If you want to come to the Conference contact the office for more info.

Join the Teen DAWG email list by sending an email with the subject "subscribe teen" to beth@wvdawg.org



Conference in Canaan



Valley -We are also working on the a teen track for the Annual Family Leadership Conference in April. We are going to make it



- Even if you are working you may still qualify for benefits such as help with food and medical expenses
- You have a 60 month life time limit on TANF cash assistance. (a welfare check)
- Some victims of Domestic Violence may qualify for WVWorks benefits after they have reached their 60 month life time limit. To find out more contact your domestic violence advocate.
- You may still qualify for food stamps and a medical card even if you have reached your 60 month life time limit.
- You can go to college full-time and receive TANF benefits. (a welfare check)

For more information contact your WVWorks case worker or contact the D.A.W.G. at (304) 347-9222

To find out about these benefits and so much more attend a Making Connections Training. To find out when the next training is contact the DAWG office.

YES! I want to help with DAWG's work.

Here is my tax deductible donation of

_____ \$100 _____ \$50
 _____ \$25 _____ other \$ _____



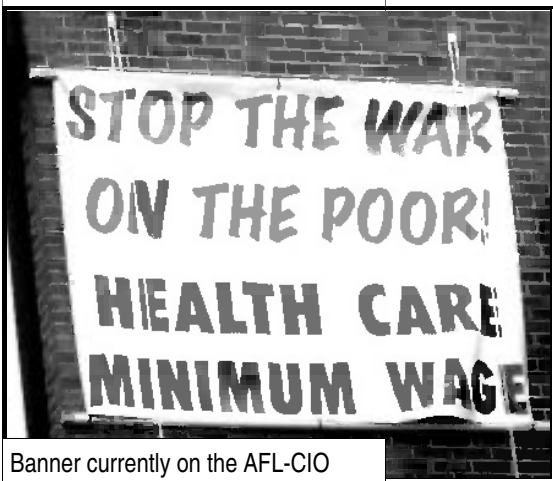
Name _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Make checks payable to DAWG and send your gift of support to
D.A.W.G. PO Box 20079, Charleston, WV 25362

Direct Action Welfare Group, Inc.
PO Box 20079
Charleston, WV 25362



Banner currently on the AFL-CIO building in Charleston.

“How can anyone go hungry in a country with so much? You have to make them listen or get rid of them. **You** have the power.”

~ a car driver in New York City from Israel

Contact D.A.W.G.

Evelyn Dortch
Executive Director
Evelyn@wvdawg.org

Jill Woodrum
Child Issue Organizer
Jill@wvdawg.org

Teen DAWG
Beth@wvdawg.org



Our History

The Direct Action Welfare Group (D.A.W.G.) grew out of a small group of friends who met in an apartment in a low-income housing project. As these women learned the rules and regulations of the many programs that affected their families, they began to share their knowledge with others in the community.

When these women began to move off public assistance and into the workforce they began to look at more issues that impacted their lives. At this point they began to encounter groups in other states who were work-

ing on these same issues. As a result of this, these women decided to become a formal organization that would provide a voice for the poor in West Virginia.

For nearly a year these women ran the organization on a strictly volunteer basis with no budget. With the help of many community organizations and grassroots groups in other states, D.A.W.G. was able to become incorporated in the state of West Virginia in 2002.

And we continue to educate, empower, and advocate.

Thanks to Public Welfare Foundation, Appalachian Community Fund, Commission on Religion in Appalachia, The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation, and Self-Development of People for supporting our work.