

CONGRESSMAN XAVIER BECERRA

"A RISING TIDE LIFTS ALL THE BOATS..."

- JOHN F. KENNEDY, 1962



August 7, 2006

Dear Friends:

Since its inception in 1938, the federal minimum wage has been increased over the years to adjust for inflation and enhance the purchasing power for modest-income Americans. At \$5.15 an hour, the federal minimum wage today stands at an abysmal, even embarrassing level.

A full-time minimum wage worker – and there are 6.6 million of them in our country – will earn only \$10,712 this year. That's less than \$900 each month! How much do you pay every month just on your mortgage, for your rent or car payment?

Perhaps most disturbing is that the White House and the Republican-controlled Congress have done nothing about this. My Republican colleagues have had ample opportunity to raise the minimum wage. In just one month (from June 22 to July 19), Democrats were able to call up seven votes on this issue. All the votes failed on strict party lines.* And then on Friday evening, July 28, a "minimum wage" bill was brought up for a vote. But was it a clean bill that only dealt with the minimum wage? Absolutely not. It was a 183-page piece of legislation titled the "Estate Tax and Extension of Tax Relief Act of 2006" (H.R. 5970). The minimum wage increase was dealt with on page 181 of the legislation. And though it would increase the minimum wage over a three year period to \$7.25, it would actually mean a pay cut to many Californians in the service industry who work for tips.

The manner by which this bill was drafted leaves little chance of it being passed in the Senate or signed by the president. And to get an idea of where the priorities of this Congress lie: if H.R. 5970 is enacted into law, 6.6 million Americans will get an average annual raise of \$1,200, while 8,200 Americans will get an average tax cut of \$1.4 million.

Congress has not increased the federal minimum wage since 1997. The cost of living, however, has risen significantly. Consider that since 1997, the cost of a gallon of regular gas has increased 136 percent; a loaf of bread has increased 25 percent; a gallon of milk has increased 24 percent; a four-year public college education has increased 77 percent; and health insurance has increased 97 percent.

I believe that Congress has a moral obligation to ensure that any American who works hard full-time, all year, will escape the grasp of poverty. I believe the time for excuses has long expired ... it is time to increase the minimum wage for American workers.

It is time to take this country in a new direction where the common good of all Americans, rather than a select few, is this Congress' top priority. You deserve affordable healthcare, lower gas prices, and policies that put us on the path to energy independence. For a change, we deserve a government that is open and accountable. In short, you deserve a government that works and works for you regardless of your station in life.

As your congressman, that is the kind of government I am fighting for.

Sincerely,

XAVIER BECERRA
Member of Congress

* To see a list of the seven votes, please go to <http://becerra.house.gov> and click on "A New Direction."

CONGRESSMAN XAVIER BECERRA
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515



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"What I preach is the interdependence of the United States. We are not 50 countries – we are one country of 50 states and one people. And I believe that those programs which make life better for some of our people will make life better for all of our people. A rising tide lifts all the boats."

– PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY, PUEBLO, COLORADO, AUGUST 17, 1962

THE MINIMUM WAGE AND THE NEED FOR A NEW DIRECTION

A 25 YEAR HISTORY OF THE MINIMUM WAGE

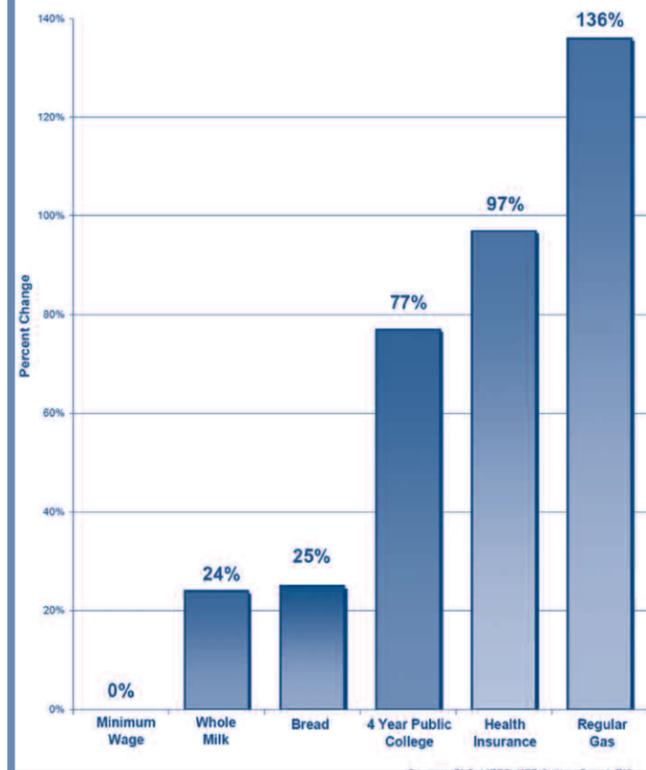
Year	FEDERAL				CALIFORNIA			
	Min Wage	Annual Min Wage Income	Federal Poverty Level for a Family of 3	Annual Min Wage vs. FPL	Min Wage	Annual Min Wage Income	Federal Poverty Level for a Family of 3	Annual Min Wage vs. FPL
1981	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 7,070	-1%	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 7,070	-1%
1982	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 7,760	-10%	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 7,760	-10%
1983	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 8,220	-15%	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 8,220	-15%
1984	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 8,460	-18%	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 8,460	-18%
1985	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 8,850	-21%	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 8,850	-21%
1986	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 9,120	-24%	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 9,120	-24%
1987	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 9,300	-25%	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 9,300	-25%
1988	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 9,690	-28%	\$ 4.25	\$ 8,840	\$ 9,690	-9%
1989	\$ 3.35	\$ 6,968	\$ 10,060	-31%	\$ 4.25	\$ 8,840	\$ 10,060	-12%
1990	\$ 3.80	\$ 7,904	\$ 10,560	-25%	\$ 4.25	\$ 8,840	\$ 10,560	-16%
1991	\$ 4.25	\$ 8,840	\$ 11,140	-21%	\$ 4.25	\$ 8,840	\$ 11,140	-21%
1992	\$ 4.25	\$ 8,840	\$ 11,570	-24%	\$ 4.25	\$ 8,840	\$ 11,570	-24%
1993	\$ 4.25	\$ 8,840	\$ 11,890	-26%	\$ 4.25	\$ 8,840	\$ 11,890	-26%
1994	\$ 4.25	\$ 8,840	\$ 12,320	-28%	\$ 4.25	\$ 8,840	\$ 12,320	-28%
1995	\$ 4.25	\$ 8,840	\$ 12,590	-30%	\$ 4.25	\$ 8,840	\$ 12,590	-30%
1996	\$ 4.75	\$ 9,880	\$ 12,980	-24%	\$ 4.75	\$ 9,880	\$ 12,980	-24%
1997	\$ 5.15	\$ 10,712	\$ 13,330	-20%	\$ 5.00	\$ 10,400	\$ 13,330	-22%
1998	\$ 5.15	\$ 10,712	\$ 13,650	-22%	\$ 5.75	\$ 11,960	\$ 13,650	-12%
1999	\$ 5.15	\$ 10,712	\$ 13,880	-23%	\$ 5.75	\$ 11,960	\$ 13,880	-14%
2000	\$ 5.15	\$ 10,712	\$ 14,150	-24%	\$ 5.75	\$ 11,960	\$ 14,150	-15%
2001	\$ 5.15	\$ 10,712	\$ 14,630	-27%	\$ 6.25	\$ 13,000	\$ 14,630	-11%
2002	\$ 5.15	\$ 10,712	\$ 15,020	-29%	\$ 6.75	\$ 14,040	\$ 15,020	-7%
2003	\$ 5.15	\$ 10,712	\$ 15,260	-30%	\$ 6.75	\$ 14,040	\$ 15,260	-8%
2004	\$ 5.15	\$ 10,712	\$ 15,670	-32%	\$ 6.75	\$ 14,040	\$ 15,670	-10%
2005	\$ 5.15	\$ 10,712	\$ 16,090	-33%	\$ 6.75	\$ 14,040	\$ 16,090	-13%
2006	\$ 5.15	\$ 10,712	\$ 16,600	-35%	\$ 6.75	\$ 14,040	\$ 16,600	-15%

SOURCES
U.S. Social Security Administration:
www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement/2005/3e.html#table3.a
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services:
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/figures-fed-reg.shtml>

Since 1997, the federal minimum wage has remained stagnant...

Economic Change Under The President

While the Minimum Wage has not increased since 1997, see what has:



... while the cost of living has increased dramatically.

★ ★ ★ ★ Congressman Becerra proposes a NEW DIRECTION FOR AMERICA ★ ★ ★ ★

Raising the minimum wage is a start, but to truly take our country in a new direction, Congress must do more ... much more. Here are six achievable, worthwhile legislative goals for 2006:

- 1. MAKE HEALTH CARE MORE AFFORDABLE** Fix the Medicare prescription drug program by eliminating wasteful subsidies and negotiating lower drug prices; invest in stem cell and other medical research.
- 2. REQUIRE FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY** Restore the budget discipline of the 1990s that helped eliminate deficits and spur record economic growth.
- 3. HELP WORKING FAMILIES** Raise the minimum wage; repeal tax giveaways that encourage companies to move jobs overseas.
- 4. CUT COLLEGE COSTS** Make college tuition deductible from taxes; expand Pell grants and cut student loan costs.
- 5. ENSURE DIGNIFIED RETIREMENT** Prevent the privatization of Social Security; expand savings incentives; ensure pension fairness.
- 6. LOWER GAS PRICES AND ACHIEVE ENERGY INDEPENDENCE** Crack down on price gouging; eliminate billions in subsidies for oil and gas companies and use the savings to provide consumer relief and develop American alternatives; promote energy efficient technology.

To learn more, please visit <http://becerra.house.gov>.

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM WASHINGTON, D.C., TO THE 31ST CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

SENATOR KERRY TAKES A TOUR OF THE 31ST DISTRICT

I took Senator John Kerry on a tour of the 31st Congressional District this past April 10 after he asked to help give him a better understanding of the implications of the various immigration proposals currently before Congress. We toured four sites in Los Angeles and met with individuals who shared their personal experiences as immigrants and as immigration advocates here in our diverse city. We started the day at the Westin Bonaventure Hotel, where 35 hotel union workers shared their personal experiences that ranged from hardship to success. Clearly evident from their stories was their dedication to family and work, and a love for this country that has provided them a respectable job and a consistent paycheck. We then joined community leaders and government officials at Clinica Monseñor Romero, where we learned of the challenges in providing health services to the immigrant community. Following that fantastic, educational visit, Senator Kerry and I held a question and answer session with high school students at the Santee Education Complex. These students were impressive! They asked hard questions ... good questions – about immigration reform, about the war in Iraq and a host of other issues. It's clearly evident that Santee is producing not just good students, but future community leaders. Finally, we made an impromptu stop by the Mercado La Paloma (see more about the Mercado in the next story) for lunch and a discussion with the hardworking vendors and the leaders of the many community-based organizations housed there. What a day! As Congress continues to work on comprehensive immigration reform, I believe it is important that stakeholders in this debate have the opportunity to see and meet the community they will impact.



During Senator Kerry's tour of the 31st Congressional District, we held a question and answer session with students at the Santee Education Complex.

FEDERAL BOOST FOR NEIGHBORHOOD ECONOMIC ENGINE



The Mercado la Paloma in South Los Angeles provides a dynamic neighborhood-based public market site where close to 20 low-income entrepreneurs realize their dream of owning their own business. An economic development project of Esperanza Community Housing Corporation, this center draws patrons from near and far. To be successful, projects like this require many contributing partners ... Esperanza with the vision to finance and build it, neighbors with the commitment to shop locally, vendors with the hard work of running a small business, and government leaders with the ability to bring additional needed funds. I successfully fought to secure federal funds of close to \$125,000 for capital improvement projects at the Mercado la Paloma to help ensure its success into the future.

I recently announced an infusion of federal funds for Mercado La Paloma in South Los Angeles. From left to right: Evelia Castañeda, Esperanza Community Housing Corporation; Araceli Flores, from Genuin Solutions, which is located at the Mercado; me; Nancy Halpern-Ibrahim, Esperanza Community Housing Corporation; Sister Diane Donoghue, Esperanza Community Housing Corporation; and Morella Lombardi from the Los Angeles district office of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

HIGH SCHOOL ARTISTS REMEMBER THEIR HERITAGE

I had the absolute pleasure of hosting the 14th annual 31st Congressional District Art Competition for high school students this past April 22 at the Southwest Museum. Students from seven high schools submitted entries that reflected this year's theme, "Remembering Our Heritage." The first and second place winners were Salma Vir Banks and Lori Wong from Ribet Academy and the third place winner was Diana Ramirez from Franklin High School. As the top winner, Salma Vir Banks joined me June 28 in Washington, D.C., for a national ribbon cutting ceremony on Capitol Hill. Her winning piece will hang in the Capitol building for one year. All three students were recognized July 5 at Dodger Stadium. As the author of H.R. 2134, legislation that would establish a commission to study the potential creation of a national museum focused on Latino art, history and culture, I always have and forever will appreciate the importance of preserving and remembering the cultural and artistic diversity of our nation.



Salma Vir-Banks, the winner of the 31st Congressional District's 2006 Art Competition, which took place at the Southwest Museum this past April 22, earned the honor of having her artwork, an untitled painting, hang in the U.S. Capitol for one year.



Congressman Becerra took Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts on a tour of his congressional district this past April where they explored the need for and assessed the impact of comprehensive immigration reform. Here, Senator Kerry joins Congressman Becerra to answer questions posed by high school students at the Santee Education Complex. To read more about the senator's visit, open to the inside of the newsletter.

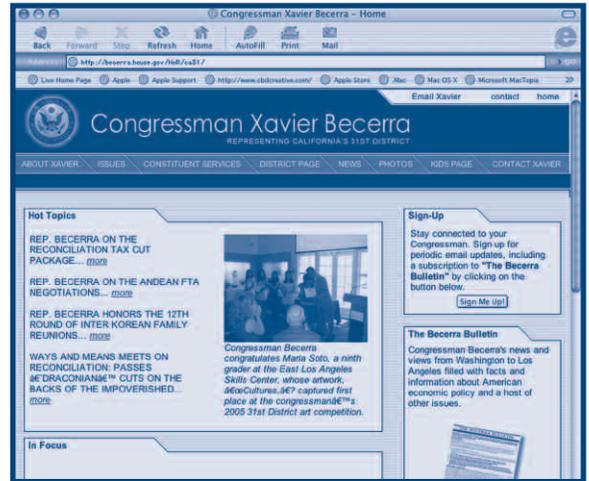
ALSO INSIDE:

- Learn more about the federal minimum wage
- Read Congressman Becerra's plan for "A NEW DIRECTION FOR AMERICA"
- Federal dollars secured for a neighborhood development



Congressman Becerra has been a steadfast proponent for fair and comprehensive immigration reform. At an April 10 event in Downtown Los Angeles, Rep. Becerra thanked a massive crowd of participants for their civic engagement on this critical issue. "The American public is ready for Congress to act," he said. "Momentum is building for a comprehensive immigration bill thanks to your efforts at rallies nationwide. I encourage you to stay engaged in the debate on this important issue and share your views and opinions with your representatives in Congress. An issue this important, an issue that will have so great an impact on so many people, requires us to work together."

ARE YOU CONNECTED TO YOUR CONGRESSMAN?



Log on to my Web site (<http://becerra.house.gov>) to read the latest news from Washington, D.C., and about the 31st Congressional District. Learn about the various ways my office can be helpful. Email me, or also sign up for periodic email updates, including a subscription to the "Becerra Bulletin."

Log on to <http://becerra.house.gov> and sign up!



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