

Minimum wage must be raised

Contrary to the constant talk about budget cutting in Washington, President Clinton has proposed increasing the federal minimum wage to \$5.15 an hour, an increase of 90 cents from the current rate of \$4.25.

The time has come to increase the minimum wage.

Congressional Republicans have generally been opposed to the proposal, arguing that a raise would destroy jobs for minority teenagers, older Americans and low-skilled workers.

However, the fact remains that a person cannot survive on the minimum wage as it is now, much less support a family. A person working a 40-hour week at \$4.25 an hour will not make enough money in a month to pay for essentials such as food, shelter, clothing or child care. An increase in the minimum wage puts more money in the pockets of the people who desperately need it — the working poor.

This fact is reflected in the job market. Relatively few jobs, even those for unskilled labor, are paid at the minimum wage. For the time spent on the job, a person will make very little money from a job that pays minimum wage.

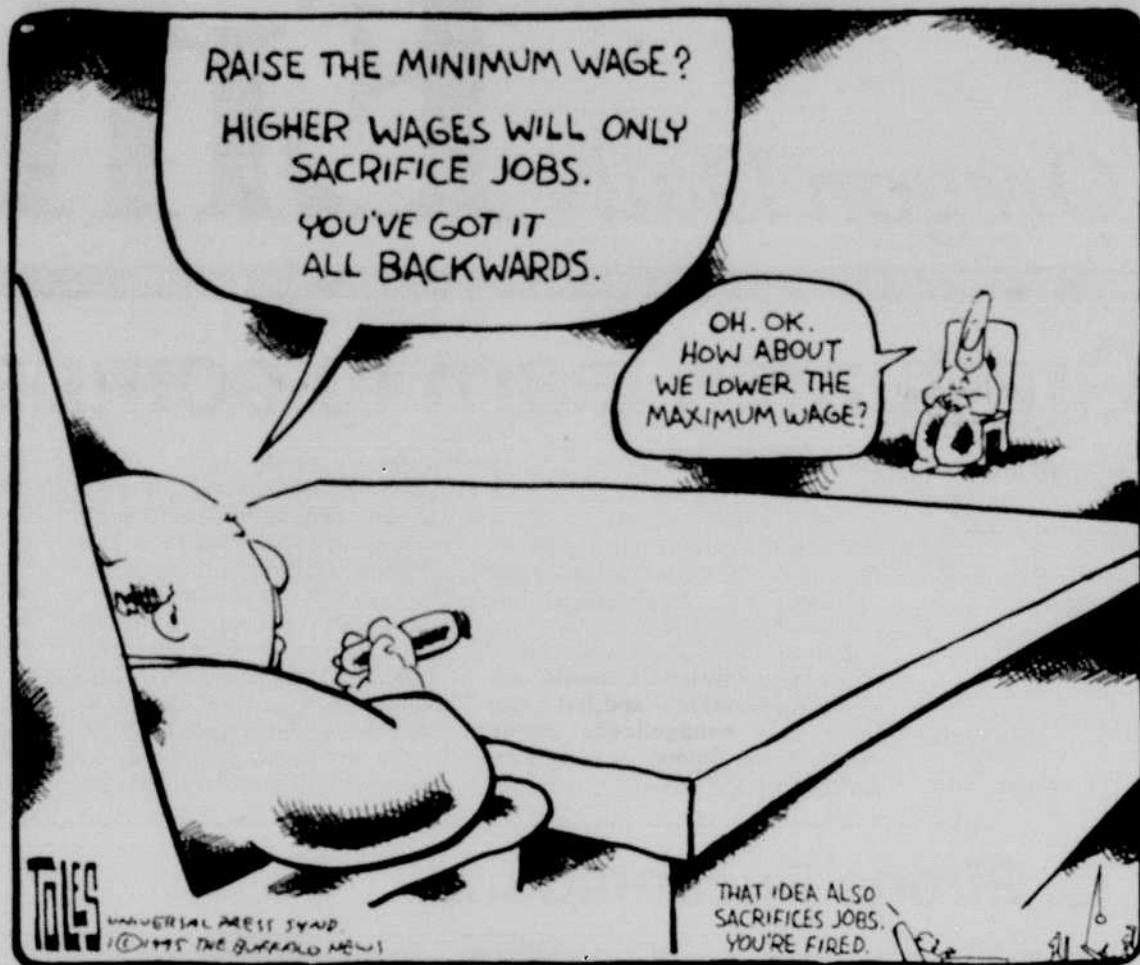
With all of the emphasis on getting people off of welfare, the minimum wage becomes more important. One can't seriously expect a family to get off welfare if the alternative is working 40 hours a week at a job that pays less. It isn't realistic. Minimum wage is an incentive to help people leave the welfare program and get a job that pays a decent wage, no matter what their skills. The minimum wage should reward people for hard work.

The effect of a change in the federal minimum wage in Oregon would be limited, as Oregon's minimum wage is \$4.75 — 50 cents above the current federal minimum. However, the increase would be felt here in Eugene, as a number of students work one, or often several, minimum or near-minimum wage jobs to financially survive the college experience.

There are concerns that the minimum wage program as a whole hurts the people who are least employable, generally unskilled labor and young workers. However, those people need to be able to earn a living wage for their labor too, and the minimum wage program makes that possible.

The minimum wage is a win-win program. It helps to reward work and to ensure that employees of all skill levels earn a wage they can survive on. It's been five years since the minimum wage was increased, but prices are higher than they were in 1990. What was a livable minimum wage in 1990 is not livable in 1995.

Congress should increase the minimum wage to \$5.15. It's just not possible to live on the current minimum wage, and Americans shouldn't be forced to work long hours for low wages.



OPINION

Cuts threaten public broadcasting



Gayle Forman

At night, if you're real quiet and point your ears toward Washington, you can hear the sound of the knives being sharpened. Them politicians is going to trim the fat of government, and they're starting with that mecca of waste that we call public broadcasting.

With all the programs the government funds using our money, it has decided to gang up on the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) — a program millions of us actually use. The newly elected GOP housecleaning crew cites CPB as an example of yet another useless program, more wasteful spending. But what they neglect to mention is that CPB received a mere \$248.4 million in 1994. That costs \$1.09 per taxpayer per year!

Taxpayers should be insulted that their Congress is seeking to cut one of the few programs that directly benefits everyone. It's just plain rude. These guys came into office on the promise that they were going to put government on a diet. Now the fat cats are turning to us and telling us we have to give up our minuscule salad first.

And CPB — like that salad — is good for you. We all use it, and we all learn from it. It also helps us to keep informed. National Public Radio and the MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour give people news each day they can't get anywhere else.

And to add more insult, the government would have to cut 100 more programs of CPB's size before even a dent was made in the national budget. Let them

cut all of the ridiculously obsolete programs — like the spy satellites we still build to spy on the Russians even though there is no more "evil empire" — before they even start talking about cutting the programs that real people benefit from every day.

But of course the hatchet job proposed for CPB has nothing at all to do with saving money. It's a great political move; right-wing politicians can pay lip service to cutting big government while getting rid of a program they have long hated. To the public — who may not realize that cutting public broadcasting is something akin to trying to slay a giant by slicing off his hangnail — it seems like the government is doing its job. And Newt and his buddies in the GOP can destroy one more enemy member of the evil counter-culture cultural elite. (In case you hadn't realized, Big Bird and Cookie Monster are real nasty counter-culture snobs. So is that painting-teacher guy with the big Afro.) Politicians won't be destroying the elite, but they will be blocking access to learning and to information. And that's what really scares them.

CPB and the Republican Party have a long history of dissension. Republicans don't like the programming and in the last decade have seemingly punished CPB for its programming by consistently cutting funding. During the Reagan administration, public broadcasting was so deregulated and de-funded that it found itself in a crisis for funds. Now CPB is funded mostly by grants and donations. The \$248 million it gets from the government is pocket change.

But to lose that money will once again threaten CPB's existence. CPB, the entity, will manage. Oregon Public Broadcasting will survive, but cuts could force many smaller stations — particularly radio stations — off the air. Radio stations that are in

small markets or rural areas, like KLCC, do not have a large population base to fund them by donations. The cut in government funds could decimate them.

Funding cuts are also pushing CPB to operate more like a commercial station, by forcing it to solicit money from the business sector. The more heavily it relies on outside funding, the more the programming will reflect the dictates imposed by those who are doing the funding. By privatizing CPB, we are putting those with the most money in charge. The whole idea behind public broadcasting is to have programming that is free from the pressures and constraints of advertisers and private industry. How ironic it is that the government is the one bullying CPB, not private industry.

We need to send a message to our government. Let them know we're not as stupid as they think we are, that we realize these "necessary" funding cuts are just a smoke screen. What's really going on is a cultural war against an enemy is knowledge. Because behind all that rhetoric about the cultural elite lies a fear of the informed citizen. Public broadcasting helps to keep us informed in a way mainstream media does not, and that scares politicians. And so it should.

So let's keep them on their toes and keep ourselves informed. If you want to bully the government for a change, write to your national representative and let them know that you use and support public broadcasting and don't approve of funding cuts.

Write to Sens. Packwood and Hatfield at the United States Senate, Washington D.C. 20515 or to U.S. Reps. at The United States House of Representatives, Washington D.C. 20510.

Gayle Forman is a columnist for the Emerald.

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Newsroom: 346-5511
Business Office: 346-5512

Display Advertising: 346-3712
Classified Advertising: 346-4343