

Activity I: Claude Pepper and Minimum Wage

History of the Minimum Wage:

A minimum wage is a minimum hourly, weekly, or monthly wage that an employer is required to pay his or her employee. The United States has had national minimum wage legislation in place since 1933, except for a brief hiatus between 1935 and 1938. Some states have their own statewide minimum wage laws, which are either equal to or higher than the national requirement. The current minimum wage in the United States is \$5.15/hour.

Claude Pepper and the Minimum Wage:

Claude Denson Pepper (1900 – 1989) served as both a Senator and a Congressman for the State of Florida. He was widely known as a champion of the elderly, poor, and otherwise disadvantaged. Pepper was considered a New Deal liberal, ascribing to the political and social ideals of FDR. As a Congressman, Pepper served a district in Miami from 1962 until his death in 1989. He firmly believed in protecting the minimum wage and increasing it when necessary. In the first few years of his tenure as a Congressman, the national minimum wage reached its highest purchasing power ever, at \$1.60/hour. Today, that would be roughly equivalent to \$9.12/hour.

Historical Artifacts:

Now take a look at some primary sources from Florida's political history. The next two pages chronicle a correspondence between Congressman Pepper and one of his constituents. After reading Samuel Schultz's letter and Claude Pepper's response, choose the best answer for each of the questions below:

1. What is Schultz's point of view in this letter?
 - a. He and his family need welfare from the government because they are not earning enough.
 - b. He is against any minimum wage increase because he feels he would lose his job.
 - c. He thinks an increase in the minimum wage would help workers in his industry.
 - d. He is angry at Claude Pepper for opposing the minimum wage.

2. What would be another way of saying this phrase below?

“These good Americans blame the Communists for the organizing of unions to further spoil our lives, but what else can a person do to insure a living wage.”

- a. Many Americans think that the Communists have set up unions to ruin our lives, but in fact, unions help guarantee better pay and working conditions.
- b. The good Americans ought to fight the Communists for better pay.

- c. Communism ought to be adopted by all Americans so that we'll have better pay.
 - d. There is a Communist plot to set up unions.
3. What types of letters are these?
- a. Personal letters
 - b. Complaint letters
 - c. Business letters
 - d. Cover letters

Activity II: Current Affairs – The Minimum Wage Debate Continues

Below is a list of websites; please visit at least two sites *for* and two sites *against* the minimum wage, as well as the site that lists arguments on both sides. On the next page is a chart for you to take notes. Make sure your notes are neat and legible.

FOR:

- http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/issueguides_minwage_minwagefacts (pro minimum wage)
- http://www.democracyinaction.org/dia/organizationsORG/americanprogress/content.jsp?content_KEY=1479&t=alert.dwt (discussion and form letter *for* minimum wage)
- <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20041220/dreier> (pro minimum wage)
- <http://www.livingwagecampaign.org/> (pro minimum wage)

Somewhere in the middle...

- http://www.balancedpolitics.org/minimum_wage.htm (gives arguments for both sides, plus more links at the bottom)

AGAINST:

- <http://www.mackinac.org/article.aspx?ID=674> (anti minimum wage)
- <http://www.house.gov/jec/cost-gov/regs/minimum/against/against.htm> (anti minimum wage)
- <http://www.slate.com/id/2103486/> (anti minimum wage)
- http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/_nypost-wage_hike_hooey.htm (anti minimum wage)

| Topic | Arguments for Minimum Wage | Arguments against Minimum Wage | History of Minimum Wage Legislation | Current Political Debate |
|------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Source # 1 | | | | |
| Source # 2 | | | | |
| Source # 3 | | | | |
| Source #4 | | | | |
| Source # 5 | | | | |
| Summary | | | | |

Activity III:

Now it is time to take a stand. How do you feel about raising the minimum wage? How do you feel about the U.S. having a minimum wage at all? Below are three assignments. Please ask your instructor how many of these you need to complete. Remember to use the notes that you took on the chart in order to help formulate your thoughts.

1. Writing a letter to your representative:

Did you notice the letter-writing campaign that www.democracyinaction.org was promoting? Think about the letter that Samuel Schultz wrote to Claude Pepper in 1966. Now it's your turn. Find out who your own representative is at this site: <http://www.house.gov/writerep/>, and then go to this list: <http://www.house.gov/house/MemberWWW.shtml> in order to find out how to contact your representative by "snail mail." Then, draft a business letter to your representative, telling him or her how you feel about the minimum wage.

2. Writing a letter to the editor:

Think about how this issue affects you, your family, and your community. Draft a letter to the editor of your local paper, expressing your views on whether or not the minimum wage should be increased. To make sure that you know the specifics of the minimum wage laws in your state, you can visit this site: <http://www.dol.gov/esa/minwage/america.htm>.

3. Writing a persuasive essay:

Using the facts and opinions you collected during your online research, write a 1-2 page persuasive essay for against raising the minimum wage. If you quote from any of your sources, be sure to cite them correctly. Please include a works cited.