Conclusion

Since 1938, America has supported its workers by having minimum pay standards for jobs. As our nation's prosperity grew in the 1950s and 1960s, the quality of these standards increased. By the late 1960s, minimum wage jobs constituted a reasonable bottom rung in the labor market. Since 1968, the federal government has allowed the real value of a minimum wage job to deteriorate by more than thirty percent. Today's federal minimum wage of $5.15 an hour is lower in value than at any time in more than fifty years. If the minimum wage is supposed to provide a floor, then the current rate has descended to the basement.

Today's full-time minimum-wage earner brings in $10,712 annually, 35.5 percent below the official 2006 federal poverty level for a family of three ($16,600). Yet, these workers' earnings are crucial to many families' well-being. More than 250,000 children live in families with a worker at or near the minimum wage.

The current proposal to raise the Ohio minimum wage to $6.85 by January 2007 is comparable to proposals that have passed recently, either legislatively or at the ballot box, in states across the country. Twenty states, including neighboring Michigan where the governor is expected to sign a just-passed increase, have minimum wages above the federal level. In Florida and Nevada, voters overwhelmingly authorized minimum wage hikes, by 71.3 percent and 68.3 percent, respectively.

By raising and indexing our state minimum wage, Ohio would help more than 700,000 workers, reduce poverty, ensure that inflation does not quickly erode the value of worker paychecks, strengthen communities, and improve family well-being. At the same time, Ohio could again send a message that we value work, we support those who play by the rules, and we want to move toward an economy that works for all.