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Could you live on the minimum wage?

VOCABULARY

Cloakroom =

A room for storing jackets and coats

Utilities =

Necessary household bills such electricity, water

Spontaneous, spontaneity =

To do something suddenly, with planning. "on the spur of the moment"

Discussion questions

1. Does Japan have a legal minimum wage? What is it? If not, what's a typical low-salary?
2. Have you ever tried to survive on minimum wage? How was it?
3. Do you think you could survive on the minimum wage now? Why? Why not?
4. What do you think is the most difficult aspect of living on the minimum wage?
5. Should the minimum wage be increased? What do you think is a fair level?
6. What money-saving tips would you give to a minimum wage worker?

VOCABULARY

Bologna =

A cheap processed meat product used in sandwiches

Gimmick =

A trick or device to attract attention (negative meaning)

Single-parent =

A parent (usually mother) who is raising a child without a partner

Have you ever seen a congressman snacking on a cheap tin of sardines? Or maybe a governor ordering a McChicken off the dollar menu? In Washington this week that scene was real.

Three Democratic politicians are taking the “Live the Wage challenge”.

Reps. Tim Ryan and Jan Schakowsky joined former Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland in taking the challenge. They are all living on a budget of \$77 for the week. This is the average amount that a minimum wage worker has available (after paying for major costs such as rent and utilities). The \$77 should cover food, transportation, entertainment etc

“Yesterday I only ate a couple bags of peanuts that were in the office cloakroom. There was some fruit in the office too” Rep. Ryan told ABC News. “I spent about seven dollars last night on a couple cans of sardines and a bag of crackers from a convenience store.”

The congressman began the “Live the Wage” challenge last week. They hope to bring attention to the problems facing minimum wage workers around the country. Members of Congress Plan to Live on Minimum Wage for a Week

Rep. Jan Schakowsky also began the challenge Thursday, telling ABC News “It totally changes your thinking. Usually I make a shopping list when I go to the store. I think about what I want and I buy it. I usually don’t think about how much it costs. If I see something nice, I pick it up and put it in the shopping cart. There’s no spontaneity when your budget is so small”

Strickland even took a trip to McDonald’s to try the fast food chain’s dollar menu. He said that that workers there “deserve a pay raise.” Strickland explained that he couldn’t complete the challenge with a budget of just \$77. The governor said that the most difficult point was how to eat a healthy diet with so little money.

“Fresh fruits and vegetables are too expensive so I ate bread, peanut butter, bananas and

bologna. That was the only food I could find at such a low price. And that’s why I ate lunch from the McDonald’s dollar menu.”

Recently Schakowsky and Ryan have also used Twitter and Facebook to share their message. “There are a lot of people out there who do this for a long time. We wanted to tell many people about this problem” Ryan told ABC News. “We realize it’s not going to be exactly the same as for a real minimum wage family. But the country is talking about the minimum wage now and I think that’s very important.”

Schakowsky agreed with Rep. Ryan’s opinion. “I don’t completely understand what it’s like to live on the minimum wage. But I think I got a taste of it’s a taste of it. Some people say the challenge is a gimmick. But I suggest that they try it. They will get a better understanding. It’s so hard to be constantly thinking about how much you’re spending.”

Ryan and Schakowsky were co-sponsors of the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013. Their goal is to increase the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.10. Recently many people want the minimum wage to be increased. It has not changed since 2009, but prices have increased a lot.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the minimum wage doesn’t get you very far. “On average, a single-parent household (One parent, at least one child under 18) will spend \$5,457 per year on food, or about \$105 per week.” That’s \$28 above what a minimum wage worker has to live on for a week.

“Let’s increase the minimum wage and get people to work and make sure work pays enough. That’s ultimately the conversation we want to have.”