HOW TO TALK ABOUT RAISING WAGES

For a toolkit for communications on raising wages go here:
rooseveltinstitute.org/raising-minimum-wage
FIVE ONE SENTENCE MESSAGES ON RAISING WAGES

• It’s time we took steps to raise the wage and benefit floor, with economy boosting jobs that assure families can meet the basics.
• Instead of economy busting jobs we need economy boosting jobs.
• Powerful corporations use their influence to hold down wages and benefits so people can’t meet the basics.
• Big, profitable companies pay their workers wages so little that the workers rely public programs to meet the basics, like food, housing and health care.
• Every working parent should get paid enough to care for their kids and set them off toward a great future.

The data below is national. For data on your state go here: http://s3.epi.org/files/2015/State-Factsheets-Minimum-Wage.pdf

Key minimum wage message (30 seconds): [State’s] working families and the middle-class are getting crushed. Powerful corporations are cutting our wages and benefits so people can’t even meet the basics. These economy-busting jobs are stalling our state’s economy and hurting our communities. It’s time we took steps to maintain the wage and benefit floor in [State], so our families can meet the basics. Working families and middle-class are the engines of [State’s] economy. When we raise the minimum wage so that families are paid enough to afford the basics, their spending boosts the economy and builds stronger communities. Every working parent should get paid enough to care for their kids and set them off toward a great future. It’s time [State] raised the minimum wage!

Short minimum wage message 1:
Powerful corporations are cutting our wages and benefits so people can’t even meet the basics. When we raise the minimum wage so that families are paid enough to afford the basics, their spending boosts the economy and builds stronger communities. It’s time [State] raised the minimum wage!

Short minimum wage message 2: Wages are so low that hundreds of thousands of [State] workers are below the poverty line. It’s time we took steps to maintain the wage and benefit floor in [State], so our families can meet the basics. When we raise the minimum wage so that families are paid enough to afford the basics, their spending boosts the economy and builds stronger communities. Every working parent should get paid enough to care for their kids and set them off toward a great future.

IMPORTANT LESSON ON TELLING PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT MINIMUM WAGE!!!

Many people often want to blame the worker, look for some personal shortcoming. But if we provide the context upfront, then people hear the personal story differently. So before every personal story, remember to say: “Powerful corporations use their influence to cut wages and benefits so people can not meet the basics.” And if you can tell the story so that it fills in that statement, so much the better!
enough to care for their kids and set them off toward a great future.

**Short minimum wage message 3.** We’re fighting for a [State] that works for all of us, not just the wealthy. When we raise the minimum wage so that families are paid enough to afford the basics, their spending boosts the economy and builds stronger communities. It’s time [State] raised the minimum wage!

**Minimum wage message for women and families:** Raising the minimum wage will help [State’s] women and families meet the basics to care and support our families. More than half of Americans who will get a raise are women and that includes millions of working moms and single moms. By raising the minimum wage, we’ll take a major step toward lowering the imbalance between what men and women get paid for the same work. Every working parent should get paid enough to care for their kids and set them off toward a great future.

**Minimum wage message for people of color:** Almost half of Americans who will earn more when the minimum wage is raised are people of color. Raising the minimum wage will help people of color, care and support their families and build strong communities.

**Minimum wage message for young people:** Raising the minimum wage will help young people starting out in life, meet the basics. Too many young people are stuck at low-wage jobs, even after their teen years. In fact, nine-in-ten Americans who will earn more when the minimum wage is raised are 20 years and older. Raising the minimum wage will give young people in [State] a boost when they are just getting started, leading to better earnings that will boost our state’s economy now and for years to come.

**Message on tipped minimum wage:** All workers should get the guarantee of a minimum wage to meet the basics, and that includes tipped workers – so many of whom are moms who are working to care and support their families. But people who work in restaurants at a subminimum wage – it’s just $2.13 an hour! – get paid so little that they rely on food stamps twice as often as everyone else. And when mostly women work at tipped jobs, bringing the tipped minimum wage to the same level as the regular minimum wage is an important way to end the imbalance between what women and men get paid. It’s time we ended the subminimum wage and lifted the wage floor so that every worker can care and support their families.
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH SOME KEY FACTS ON RAISING THE MINIMUM WAGE

The following are examples of how you can use the messaging when you respond to common claims by opponents.

“Businesses, not government, should be setting wages - they know best what they can afford.” Powerful corporations are cutting our wages and benefits so people can’t even meet the basics. Increasing the minimum wage raises wages for millions of Americans, boosting the economy and building stronger communities.

- Workers get $7.25. Executives get 725 percent. CEO pay has risen 725% over the last 30 years, while average wages for have been flat.
- If economic progress had been shared by fairly with workers, the minimum wage now would be over $18 an hour.

“Raising the minimum wage will cost jobs.” Numerous studies – based on real minimum wage increases – show that increases in the minimum wage will not cause employers to eliminate jobs. Instead, it will increase consumer demand, which will create more jobs. Hard-working Americans will have a little more money to spend and local businesses will benefit from it. It’s a win-win for everybody.

- One study of 500 counties found that “minimum wage increases did not cause job losses in counties with higher minimum wages.”

“Raising the minimum wage will hurt small business.”

- Putting more money in the pockets of workers to spend in our communities boosts small businesses. And it’s important to remember that two-out-of three workers who get paid the minimum wage work for big businesses, which are making record profits.

“Minimum wage workers are mostly teenagers.”

- Too many working families are working at the minimum wage, making it tough to meet the basics. In fact, nine-in-ten of those who would earn more are 20 years and older, including millions of parents. Increasing the minimum wage will give millions of families a boost, in turn boosting the economy and building stronger communities.

“WORKERS WHO GET PAID LOW WAGES” NOT “LOW WAGE WORKERS”

People are not “low-wage workers” – that sounds like there is something that makes them deserving of low wages. Instead say, “people who are paid low wages.” That puts the blame on the business.
COMBINING MINIMUM WAGE AND PAID SICK DAYS AND FAMILY LEAVE

The following are examples of how you can use the messaging when you respond to common claims by opponents.

Key Message: We need economy boosting jobs, with a higher minimum wage and paid sick days and family leave. Jobs that will allow us to care and support our families in strong communities.

Key message (30 seconds): Working families and the middle-class are getting crushed. Powerful corporations are cutting our wages and benefits so people can’t even meet the basics. These economy-busting jobs are stalling our economy and hurting our communities. It’s up to us, through our government, to maintain a wage and benefit floor, so people can care for and support their families. We can boost the economy by increasing the minimum wage for millions of Americans. And we can make sure that every job includes paid sick days and family leave, so no American has to choose between their jobs and caring for their families.

Message on Paid Leave Policies: Powerful corporations are cutting our wages and benefits so people can’t even meet the basics to care for and support our families. For millions of Americans, taking time off from work due to illness or a family emergency means sacrificing much needed income and risking losing a job. We need economy boosting jobs, with paid sick days and family leave, so no American has to choose between their jobs and caring for their families.

Combined for women: It’s up to us to maintain a wage and benefit floor, so people can care for and support their families. Six out of ten Americans who work for low wages are women, including millions of working moms, very few of whom earn paid sick days or family leave. Every working parent should get paid enough and have the flexibility at work to care for their kids and set them off toward a great future.

Combined for people of color: It’s up to us to maintain a wage and benefit floor, so people can care for and support their families. Nearly four out of ten Americans who work at low wage jobs are people of color – jobs where they are not allowed to earn paid sick days. Economy boosting jobs, with a higher minimum wage and paid sick days and family leave, will help all Americans, including people of color, care and support their families and build strong communities.