

Viewpoint **Viewpoint**



Raise New Mexico's Minimum Wage to \$7.50 – Expand Opportunity to All New Mexicans

New Mexico's sagging wage floor needs to be fixed. Fourteen states and the District of Columbia have already raised their minimum wage to establish a wage floor above the federal minimum wage of \$5.15. Eighty-two percent of Americans believe the federal minimum wage should be raised, according to a recent survey by the Pew Research Center.

In the 2006 legislative session, we have an

opportunity to take a very meaningful step towards expanding economic opportunity to all New Mexicans. New Mexico Voices for Children has joined a broad, statewide coalition, New Mexicans For A Fair Wage, calling for an increase in the state minimum wage to \$7.50, indexed to inflation so that it increases as the cost of living does, with no preemption of local wage ordinances, like that in Santa Fe.

What better way to create a family and business friendly environment than to fix our poverty wage floor?

Because our minimum wage is still so low, we need to take a significant step to expand opportunity in our state. \$7.50 is an important move forward.

As mentioned, over a dozen states have increased their minimum wage. What has happened? Have economies crumbled? Are low-income workers worse off? No. Increasing the minimum wage has not slowed job growth in *any* state.

Let's look at what happened in Santa Fe when the minimum wage increased to \$8.50/hour. Job growth in Santa Fe's hotel, restaurant and 'hospitality industry' actually accelerated above job growth in other industries. People receiving Santa Fe's new minimum wage of \$8.50 are mostly concentrated in the hospitality industry. Business was not harmed by an increase in the minimum wage, in fact, it seems to be helped.

123,000 working New Mexicans and their children would directly benefit from a wage increase to \$7.50 per hour. The extra money for medicine, food, school supplies, gasoline, home heating costs and other essentials will mean the difference between deprivation and basic care for our families. The equation is simple. When the minimum wage goes up, poverty goes down.

The vast majority (about 80%) of the people who will benefit from an increase in New Mexico's minimum wage are adults working

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full time, supporting a family. Nobody who works full-time should live in poverty.

If the path to the American dream is hard work, then we must make hard work pay. The choice is ours. Call your legislator today and tell him or her to vote yes to make work pay. Join New Mexicans For A Fair Wage by calling Lyn Wilson-King at 239-1509.



Phil Lynch, staff attorney for the Legislative Health and Human Services Committee, passed away suddenly on July 30. Phil was a dedicated child advocate, a friend and a mentor to all of us who worked with him. We will miss you, Phil!

Joseph E. Paull, a long time children's advocate, co-founder, and chair emeritus of the Human Needs Coordinating Council, passed away on November 25, 2005, in Santa Fe. Dr. Paull worked for the State Departments of Human Services, Health, and Corrections. He was instrumental in developing the New Mexico Citizen's Review Board. A memorial service will be held after the start of the legislative session. Dr. Paull will be missed by all who knew him.

Katrina Reminds Us ... Let's Not Let It Happen in New Mexico

No, we're probably not in danger of a massive hurricane. But, we are in danger of the kind of short-sighted policy decisions that weaken our infrastructure: New Mexico's ability to access quality healthcare depends hugely on adequate funding of Medicaid. About one-quarter of our population relies on Medicaid.

Hurricane Katrina reminds us how essential wise, and adequate, public investments are. Those levees could have been stronger had our policymakers at the national level chosen to allocate the necessary money over the past years.

Let's not be penny wise and pound foolish. We can slow - and even stop - the hurricane of poverty in New Mexico if we are willing to. The choice is ours. In the upcoming legislative session we have the opportunity to increase access to health care by adequately funding Medicaid. Let's do it.

Stay Informed - Join the NM Voices Legislative Alert List

Stay informed of our legislative activity. Call us at (505) 244-9505 ext. 10 to add your e-mail address to our legislative alert list or sign up on line at www.nmvoices.org. You'll receive timely e-mail alerts throughout the legislative session, as well as at other crucial times, on the issues that matter to you.

New Mexico Voices for Children Kicks Off Endowment Campaign

Here is your chance to invest in New Mexico's children by contributing to New Mexico Voices for Children. Make an endowment gift through our new LEAVE A LEGACY program, and contribute to our long-term financial security.

Our endowment program is administered by the Albuquerque Community Foundation. The Community Foundation staff is experienced in planned giving and available to help you make gifts such as real estate, life insurance, petroleum and mineral leases, and gifts in trust to the New Mexico Voices for Children Endowment Fund. Please call Laura Bass at 883-6240 if you have any questions.

Don't forget that the Katrina Act giving opportunity to any 501(c)(3) organization ends December 31, 2005. If you give before this window closes, your contribution could be 100% deductible. Please call Peggy at the foundation for more information about the Katrina Act.

Supporters giving gifts of \$1,000 or more will become LEGACY members of the New Mexico Voices for Children Endowment Fund for life.

Please make an investment today. Help us continue to be a strong voice for New Mexico's children for generations to come.

Nominate a young person for the 2006 Amy Biehl Youth Spirit Award

Nominations are now being accepted for the 2006 Amy Biehl Youth Spirit Award, which will be held on April 28, 2006. Please call 244-9505 ext. 10 for a nomination packet or download the packet from www.nmvoices.org. The deadline for nominations is February 17, 2006, 3:00 p.m.



Keynote speaker, Linda Biehl, at the 2005 Amy Biehl Youth Spirit Award

For sponsorship opportunities, please contact Stephanie Gabriel at 244-9505 ext. 15 or sgabriel@nmvoices.org.

NM Voices' Publications:

- The State of Working New Mexico 2005
- Personal Income Tax Cuts ≠ Economic Growth
- Who's Minding the Store? New Mexico's Income Tax Cut: Poor Performance, Wrong Choice
- Kids Count Data Book 2004
- The Condition of African American Children in New Mexico
- Social Security: What it Means to New Mexico
- Minority/Majority: A Profile of New Mexico's Children 2003 (A Kids Count Special Report)
- The Bare Bones Budget Report
- The Economic Impact of Increasing Food Stamp Utilization

Policy Brief Series

- Policy Brief #1: The Low Income Comprehensive Tax Rebate
- Policy Brief #2: Health Insurance for Low-Income Children
- Policy Brief #3: Benefits of Tax Rebates and Credits
- Policy Brief #4: Medicaid Look Back Periods Are Barriers to Health Insurance for Children
- Policy Brief #5: Parents' Health Insurance Benefits Children
- Policy Brief #6: Early Childhood Education
- Policy Brief #7: Taxation of Low-Income New Mexico Families
- Policy Brief #8: Strengthening the New Mexico Economy Through Unemployment Insurance Reform
- Policy Brief #9: The Impact of Medicaid on New Mexico's Economy
- Policy Brief #10: The Invisible Caretaker - Grandparents as Parents in New Mexico

A complimentary copy of all reports and policy briefs is available to NMVC supporters. Visit us online at www.nmvoices.org to make a donation.

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