



## **Mike Huckabee Renews Assault on Sanity of a Living Wage**

By: Hrafnkell Haraldsson - November, 23rd, 2013

In an email sent out to his supporters yesterday, Mike Huckabee attacked the minimum wage, saying that raising the current rate only “sounds” generous and that it will in fact hurt small business owners and put the people it is meant to help out of work. Oh those poor misguided godless liberals.

But wasn't it Mike Huckabee who, in 2006, signed a \$1.10 minimum wage increase (from \$5.15 to \$6.25 an hour) into law in his own state of Arkansas at the urging of the National Council of Churches? Godless liberals indeed:

The people of Arkansas in overwhelming numbers agreed that raising the minimum wage was the right thing to do,” said the Rev. Steve Copley, who spearheaded the coalition to persuade the legislature to take action. “The polls showed that Arkansans believe it is wrong for anyone who works hard and plays by the rules to earn a wage so low that they are in poverty.

Oh dear. The National Council of Churches even called it a “love-overdue raise.” Copley called it a “moral issue.”

Oh dear, oh dear.

The government-hating anarchists over at the Club for Growth were less than amused, of course calling Huckabee a liberal.

And as so often happens with conservatives, Huckabee is arguing against a position that is increasingly popular. In 2006, 87 percent of Arkansans supported an increased state minimum wage, and, as a February 2012 poll demonstrated, 73 percent of Americans supporting a federal minimum wage of \$10/hr, indexed to inflation, while a November 11, 2013 Gallup poll showed 76 percent support for a minimum wage hike to \$9/hr.

The federal minimum wage currently stands at a miserly \$7.25/hour, or \$14,500/year for a full-time employee. This rate went into effect on July 24, 2009 and the effective buying power of that \$7.25 is less than 1981's minimum wage of \$3.35/hr, which would have a buying power today of \$8.61 according to Politifact.com.

No conservative alive today can explain how a worker today should be paid less than in 1981, or how that worker should make ends meet...well, okay MacDonald's helpfully suggests their employees break their food up into small pieces and that they sell their Christmas presents for money.

Each state has its own minimum wage laws. My own state of Illinois has a state minimum wage of \$8.25/hr. And of course, according to The Federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), some employees (seasonal workers, babysitters, and others) are exempt from minimum wage requirements.

President Obama campaign in 2008 on a pledge to raise the minimum wage to \$9.50/hr by 2011. In his state of the union address in February 2013 he called for a federal minimum wage of \$9.00/hr or \$18,000/yr by 2015, which, as CNN Money explained, “is still below the poverty level for a family of four.”

Tonight, let’s declare that in the wealthiest nation on Earth, no one who works full-time should have to live in poverty and raise the federal minimum wage to \$9.00 an hour. ... So here’s an idea that Governor Romney and I actually agreed on last year: Let’s tie the minimum wage to the cost of living, so that it finally becomes a wage you can live on.

The president is now backing a measure (the Harkin-Miller proposal) which takes inflation into account and which would raise the minimum wage to a still wholly inadequate \$10.10/hour.

Huckabee, of course, tries to sound reasonable while ignoring all the facts (which, admittedly, is probably the best strategy when all those facts are against you):

Raising the minimum wage to \$15, or more in some cases, is an issue that you don’t have to declare yourself a socialist to back. It’s becoming more popular, because it sounds so generous and so easy. Being generous with other people’s money is always easy. It’s true that a lot of people on the lower end of the pay scale are having a tough time these days. But in many cases, small business owners who pay the minimum wage for entry level workers are putting in so many hours and taking so little out that they’re lucky to make minimum wage themselves. If they have to double what they’re paying their employees, they’ll have no choice to fire half of them. And that doesn’t really help the workers.

In fact, small business owners “are divided about raising the national minimum wage to \$9.50 an hour from its current \$7.25. Forty-seven percent would approve of a law that would do this, while 50% would disapprove,” according to a new Gallup poll. And never mind the little fact that two-thirds of those making minimum wage work for companies that employ 100+ people. Further, CFO.com reports that,

A 2006 study by the Fiscal Policy Institute, a nonpartisan research organization, concluded that, historically, increases in the minimum wage benefit small businesses from a “combination of higher productivity through improved worker retention and savings on recruitment and training. There may also be a ‘Henry Ford’ effect at work: if you pay workers more, they can buy more, boosting the overall economy, especially among small retail businesses.”

Huckabee says, “Of course, many of the same people who promote a much higher minimum wage also favor more government benefits for the unemployed.”

He says this like it is a bad thing, a society wanting to take care of its own, to make America a place where employees are not only paid a living wage but where those who are unable to find work are not

made to starve. Republicans insist all these children be born but they have no interest in feeding those children once born.

Sometimes – okay, quite a bit of the time – Republican arguments are just absurd. In a 2012 report by the Cato Institute, authored by Mark Wilson, it was argued (among other things) that being forced to pay higher wages will encourage employers to automate their employees right out of a job. Mike Huckabee likes this solution too, saying “As tough as it might be for low-skilled workers to survive on a fast food job, imagine how much tougher it would be with NO fast-food jobs.”

While we’re on the subject of the absurd, we already know from David Barton that Jesus opposed the minimum wage (based on his incredibly flawed reading of Matthew 20:1-16) and that Michele Bachmann, Newt Gingrich, Haley Barbour – and Mike Huckabee, all agree with him, so it’s no wonder Huckabee has renewed his opposition. After all, it was Huckabee, who, when he was not rooting for rapists, said that Americans should be forced at gunpoint to listen to David Barton in the first place.

Of course, as always, Barton – and therefore Huckabee – is wrong about this biblical verse. As New Testament scholar Geza Vermes writes, “The God of Jesus is comparable to a warm-hearted and generous employer, like the owner of a vineyard who is ready to overpay some of his hired labourers” (The Authentic Gospel of Jesus, 2003:413). This has nothing to do with America’s corporatists who are as far from generous and warm-hearted as can be, and who far from overpaying their laborers are intent on underpaying them. Leave it to Barton to draw the wrong conclusions.

The Heritage Foundation falsely claims that Obama has already effectively raised the minimum wage by way of the requirements of the Affordable Care Act. Republicans also often claim that higher wages will not only slow job creation but cause layoffs and cost companies money, a myth economists have dispelled, the Center for American Progress noting that, “The argument that a higher minimum wage will be a job killer simply doesn’t pass the sniff test of basic economic arithmetic, and is contradicted by reams of serious economic research.” Finally, they claim that the minimum wage is effectively a tax on employers.

The Republican attitude toward questions about raising the minimum wage is to tell the questioner to “get a job,” which, while a neat dismissal, does nothing to answer the question or to even address the problem. This is all too typical of modern-day Republicanism in general, whatever the question.

Since you have to figure that since at least SOME of Huckabee’s constituents are hobbling by on the current minimum wage this message will become an increasingly difficult sell. I mean, how do you convince people who can’t afford three square meals to support limiting their own income? You have to be incredibly stupid to think corporations can’t afford to pay a living wage. They just have to give up a little bit of their profits to do it.

From the Center for American Progress:

Businesses could also give up some of their handsome profits to pay for the minimum-wage increase. Profits of nonfinancial corporations rose by 124 percent from their trough in December 2008 to

September 2012, the latest quarter for which data are available.[4] The entire minimum-wage increase—averaging 11.2 percent for current workers affected by the minimum-wage raise—would have amounted to just 2.4 percent of annualized nonfinancial corporate profits in 2011.[5] U.S. businesses would remain immensely successful, even if paying a higher minimum wage affects their bottom line.

They're not going to go out of business by paying people more but they might go out of business by refusing to do so. As Jason Easley explained here the other day, a study shows that Walmart could pay its employees \$25,000/r without having to raise prices. And in fact, as Sarah Jones explained, companies like Walmart are slowly killing themselves by refusing to pay their employees a living wage because nobody can afford to shop there anymore. I used to work in retail management in my younger days; I could not afford to shop where I worked, even as a manager.

Huckabee complains that it is easy to spend somebody else's money; it is apparently far easier from his perspective to starve somebody else, including children, and since he also opposes the Affordable Care Act, to let them die as well.

The whole conservative argument revolves around protecting the profits of corporations and the rich based on the false assumption that wealth trickles down. Though disproven again and again, these stalwart servants of corporate America want you to think that while the federal government will enslave you that the CEO and Board of Directors will set you free. Don't drink that Kool-Aid because it just ain't so.