

# US Senate kills bill to raise minimum wage

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The United States Senate on Tuesday voted down a bill to raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.15 an hour by January 2000. The proposal would have mandated a 50 cent per hour increase next January, followed by another 50 cent boost the following January.

The vote, along party lines, was 55 to 44, with all but two Republicans opposing the increase and all but two Democrats voting in favor. (One Democrat, Ohio Senator John Glenn, did not vote.)

At present some 10 million American workers receive the minimum wage, and another 2 million get between \$5.15 and \$6.15 an hour. Minimum wage employees who work 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year take in a paltry \$10,700, which is \$2,900 below the government's official poverty level for a family of three. Even were the \$1 increase proposed in the Democrat-backed bill to be implemented, a worker's annual income would still fall more than \$800 below the poverty line.

The bill was sponsored by Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy and nominally backed by the Clinton administration. It was brought forward as an amendment to a Republican-backed bill, virtually certain to pass the Senate later this month, that would change federal bankruptcy laws to make it more difficult for most individuals to sweep away their debts.

The Democrats' backing for the bill was largely of a token character. Kennedy brought the bill forward in the run-up to the November congressional elections in order to use Republican opposition as a campaign issue. But he and the rest of the Democrats accepted as a foregone conclusion that it would be defeated and did little to build popular support for it. Democrats in the House of Representatives did not even bother to introduce corresponding legislation. Clinton himself made no attempt to fight for its passage.

As a result business lobbyists had an easy time

disposing of the minimum wage bill. R. Lee Culpepper, a lobbyist for the National Restaurant Association, boasted: 'Any time you can defeat a hike in the minimum wage six weeks before an election, that's impressive.'



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