

# Jacksonville, Florida residents speak on inadequate minimum wage increase

Juan Rodriguez, Matthew Taylor  
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On January 1, Florida's minimum wage increased from \$7.93 per hour to \$8.05 per hour, a difference of merely 1.5 percent. This is part of an annual increase established in 2004 with the passing of a constitutional amendment designed to increase wages along with inflation each year. A full-time worker earning minimum wage will thus earn approximately \$16,744 in 2015, a figure scarcely higher than the federal poverty guideline for a family of two.

During the ten-year period since the amendment was passed in Florida, wages have increased less than \$2 per hour, from \$6.15 in 2004. Meanwhile, a report earlier this year showed that Florida ranks eighth-worst for social inequality, ahead of just six states and the District of Columbia. Between 1979 and 2011, the richest 1 percent of Florida citizens received a whopping 116 percent average gain in income, which reached \$1.14 million, while the rest of the state received an 8 percent average decrease in income, which fell to \$35,393 during the same period.

Another report released this year by Bloomberg included five Florida cities in its list of the 50 most unequal cities in the United States, the largest number for any single state. Miami, Gainesville, and Tampa all placed within the top 10.

Labor statistics from October show that Florida has an unemployment rate of 6 percent, which was above the national average of 5.8 percent. As in other states, workers in Florida have suffered disproportionately during the current economic crisis with official unemployment rates reaching 12 percent in 2010. The real unemployment rate, masked by the statistical methods, continues to be much higher.

The crisis further weakened a state economy that had already been ravaged by significant job losses when the housing bubble burst between 2006 and 2007.

Especially significant was the loss of many higher paying construction jobs, which forced workers to enter the low-paying service industry.

Workers living in Jacksonville, Florida's largest city, recently took time to speak to the WSWs about this inadequate wage increase.

Cherryl, an office worker, made clear her feeling that the minimum wage should be higher. "Ten dollars an hour is not even enough to live on. My sister's son makes minimum wage. He is 29 and lives at home [with his parents]." Cherryl's daughter Mikayla, who is attending graduate school, asked rhetorically: "how do people eat? I'm living off of student loans, and I know that I could not live off of that kind of money."

Patricia, who was out walking with her husband Hector at Jacksonville's landing, also expressed her concern. "My brother makes minimum wage and he is not doing well," she explained. Hector added, "I make \$46,000 per year, and I'm still worried about my future. We save where we can but we're still worried about money."

Melissa, who works in sales at a local store, spoke with the WSWs prior to her scheduled work shift. "Do I think \$8.05 is enough to live off of? No," she stated, bluntly. "I make \$9.25, which is still not livable. There's never enough money. No matter how long or hard you work."

Virgee, a Christian missionary working amongst the sizable homeless population in downtown Jacksonville, explained the effects of the increasing cost of living that is not being offset by the meager increase in minimum wage. "Everything costs more these days," she claimed. "Eight dollars is not enough for anyone to live on. People everywhere are suffering."

Jacksonville residents also made clear their position on the Democratic Party and the Republican Party.

Hector maintained that “they are both all about staying in power. They say whatever we want to hear and keep on doing the same thing. They’re eating caviar while people are out there rummaging through the trash.” Melissa scoffed at the mere mention of both parties, stating that “the only people they’re talking about are the rich and the ‘middle class,’ but we aren’t even middle class. We’re poor.”

The comments of those interviewed is an expression of working class resentment towards the two bourgeois ruling-class parties.

The minimum wage increase is welcomed by workers desperate for a few more dollars to help them to survive, but most recognize that the amount is entirely inadequate for maintaining a decent standard of living.



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