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Could you live on the minimum wage?

VOCABULARY

Cloakroom =

A room for storing jackets and coats

Utilities =

Necessary household bills such electricity, water

Spontaneous, spontaneity =

To do something suddenly, with planning. "on the spur of the moment"

Discussion questions

1. Does Japan have a legal minimum wage? What is it? If not, what's a typical low-salary?
2. Have you ever tried to survive on minimum wage? How was it?
3. Do you think you could survive on the minimum wage now? Why? Why not?
4. What do you think is the most difficult aspect of living on the minimum wage?
5. Should the minimum wage be increased? What do you think is a fair level?
6. What money-saving tips would you give to a minimum wage worker?

VOCABULARY

Bologna =

A cheap processed meat product used in sandwiches

Gimmick =

A trick or device to attract attention (negative meaning)

Single-parent =

A parent (usually mother) who is raising a child without a partner

Have you ever seen a congressman snacking on a cheap tin of sardines? Or maybe a governor ordering a McChicken off the dollar menu? In Washington this week that scene was reality for three Democratic politicians who are taking the Live the Wage challenge.

Reps. Tim Ryan and Jan Schakowsky joined former Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland in taking the challenge. They are all living on a budget of \$77 for the week which is the same amount that a minimum wage worker usually has to spend on food, transportation and day-to-day expenses. (after paying for major costs such as rent and utilities)

“Yesterday I only had a couple bags of peanuts in the cloakroom and there was a little fruit in the office” Rep. Ryan told ABC News. “I spent about seven dollars last night on a couple cans of sardines and a bag of crackers from a convenience store.”

The congressman began the “Live the Wage” challenge last week. They hope to bring attention to the hardships facing minimum wage workers around the nation. Members of Congress Plan to Live on Minimum Wage for a Week

Rep. Jan Schakowsky also began the challenge Thursday, telling ABC News “It totally changes your perspective. Usually I make a shopping list when I go to the store. I think about what I want and I put it in the cart. I usually don’t think about how much it costs. I’ll walk down the aisle and I’ll see something and I throw it in the cart. There’s no spontaneity when you’re on that kind of budget.”

Strickland even took a trip to McDonald’s to try out the fast food chain’s dollar menu, and said that workers there “deserve a raise.” Strickland explained that he was unable to complete the week-long challenge with a budget of just \$77. The governor said that one very difficult point was how to eat a healthy diet while living on a \$7.25 hourly wage.

“Because fresh fruits and vegetables are hard to find at a price within a minimum wage budget, I

ate bread, peanut butter, bananas and bologna more than anything else. That was what I could find when I took this budget to the grocery store last Sunday. And that’s why I ate lunch from the McDonald’s dollar menu.”

Recently Schakowsky and Ryan have also taken share their message about the challenges facing minimum wage workers on social media. “There are a lot of people out there who do this for extended periods of time – years – so the idea is to get the message out and raise awareness about some of the difficulties that can happen to you,” Ryan told ABC News. “We realize it’s not going to be exactly like the challenges that a minimum wage family faces, but the country is talking about the minimum wage right now. And I think that’s exactly what we want to do.”

Schakowsky agreed with Rep. Ryan’s sentiments. “I’m not going to pretend that now I understand what it’s like to live on the minimum wage. I think it’s a taste of it. But for anyone who thinks it’s a gimmick, my suggestion would be–try it. You will get a small sense of what it’s like to be constantly thinking about how much you’re spending.”

Ryan and Schakowsky were co-sponsors of the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013. Their goal is to increase the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.10. The push to increase the national minimum has steadily increased in the past year as the minimum wage has not changed since 2009.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the minimum wage doesn’t get you very far. “On average, a single-parent household (One parent, at least one child under 18) will spend \$5,457 per year on food, or about \$105 per week.” That’s \$28 above what a minimum wage worker has to live on for a week.

“Let’s increase the minimum wage and get people to work and make sure work pays enough. That’s ultimately the conversation we want to have.”