

The Great Living Wage Debate Continues at St. Mary's College

Posted by [TBN](#) On 10/25/2006

Just over a month ago, St. Mary's College students joined forces with college Union employees to rally for a more substantial, "Living Wage." Since then, college administrators and the Board of Trustees have been examining the issue and hired two consultants, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Sage Policy Group Anirban Basu and author and Ph.D. Heather Bouchey from the Center for Economic and Policy Research to help them with their endeavor.

Monday evening, Labor Economist Dr. Bouchey led a Living Wage forum in which fifty people attended to show their interest, ask questions, and learn more about the issue. According to Bouchey Living Wage campaigns are popping up around the nation, the first occurring in Baltimore in 1994, as a result of the nationwide trend of declining wage standards. In her presentation, she cited that since 1978, people are spending more hours at work, yet their pay after being adjusted for inflation is not increasing. Meanwhile, income growth is being concentrated in the top salaries. "To my mind, this spells crisis for American families," Bouchey commented. "They're working harder but not seeing any gains."

Bouchey described a Living Wage as "setting a floor." Nationally, over 120 communities have taken the initiative to set a Living Wage because there is no longer "a sense that the federal government is setting a wage standard floor. This is a Congress that says, 'We're not going to set a floor.' The federal government is not going to do it for you."

To support the argument, Bouchey shared that after inflation adjustments, the current \$5.15 minimum wage is the lowest it has been in fifty years and, come this December, workers will experience the longest period in history without a minimum wage increase. As a resident of Washington D.C., she shared the success of the city's campaign to establish a Living Wage by raising the city minimum wage to \$7.00 per hour.

Although Bouchey did not have an answer for "What is a Living Wage for St. Mary's County?" she did explain that communities, not the government, must establish their own scale for what it costs a family to purchase a "safe and decent standard of living." In rural Maryland, the estimated Living Wage for one adult and one child, erring on the low side, is \$27,288. However, she explained that the college must determine its own Living Wage.

In the past month the Board of Trustees received pressure from some students for not passing the contract that Union and college officials agreed to. Chairman of the Board Jim Muldoon stated that board would be "violating our duty to the school by passing something we did not know enough about." At the conclusion of their study, the Board intends to reach a decision on the Living Wage question by their December meeting and plans to make the new contract terms retro-active.

Copyright © 2019 thebaynet.com. All rights reserved.