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On the Republican-Led Filibuster of Minimum Wage Legislation in the Senate

Statement of Christine Owens, Executive Director of the National Employment Law Project

“Today, a bi-partisan majority of Senators—55—stood with the vast majority of Americans—more than 70 percent—in support of raising the minimum wage and in defense of one of our core values: that for a hard day’s work one should earn enough to provide a decent life for oneself and one’s family. Unfortunately, a minority group of Senators—all Republicans—have sided with their big business supporters and cravenly used the filibuster to deny Americans the raise they deserve.

“As a result, 28 million working Americans and their families will continue to struggle to make ends meet. Fifteen million working women will continue to toil for wages worth less now than when Richard Nixon took office. Fourteen million children will continue to wonder why their parents work so hard and are gone so long but earn so little. And all of us will needlessly continue to absorb the costs of billions of dollars in public assistance for the working poor—and an economy not operating at its full potential.

“Given an up-or-down, simple-majority vote, there is little question that the Harkin-Miller bill to raise the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 with automatic cost-of-living adjustments and a pay increase for tipped workers would pass both houses of Congress. For most Americans—including 57 percent of small business owners—paying people enough money so they can stay out of poverty and contribute to our economy is not a radical idea: it’s common sense. But for 46 Senators more in touch with their well-heeled contributors than the daily lives of their constituents, it is an ideological line in the sand.

“It is a hopeful sign that while Congress dithers, cities and states around the country have heeded the President’s call to raise wages on their own. Maryland and Connecticut have already passed increases to \$10 this year, with Vermont, Massachusetts, Hawaii, and cities like Seattle slated to join them in the coming weeks. But America is facing a national wage crisis, and it demands a national response. With low-wage occupations accounting for a far larger proportion of jobs created in the recovery than those lost during the recession, we are increasingly a low-pay nation. And the situation is worsening: with prices rising, every week that Congress fails to act represents a pay cut for millions of Americans.

“The legislation before Congress is not a panacea. But it is a crucial first step toward reversing decades of wage stagnation, stanching the corrosive spread of economic inequality, and re-establishing an economy that works for all of us, not just the wealthy few. It is time to hold those who

stand in the way of its passage accountable. And opponents of the minimum wage need to know that this is not the end of the fight, but the first step in a campaign that will not stop until we raise the minimum wage to the level that our nation's workers need and deserve."

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*Christine Owens is the Executive Director of the **National Employment Law Project**, a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts research and advocates on issues affecting low-wage and unemployed workers. For more about NELP, visit www.nelp.org or www.raisetheminimumwage.org.*