

our fiscal discipline and jeopardize our ability to save Social Security and Medicare and pay the debt down by 2013.

They also say they want to put this in over 3 years, not 2. That would mean \$900 less in wages for a full-time minimum wage worker. If Republican leaders send me a bill that makes workers wait for another year for their full pay raise and holds the minimum wage hostage for risky tax cuts that threaten our prosperity, I'll veto it.

It is time to stop nickel-and-diming the American working people out of the money that they need and deserve. This is just wrong. This is wrong. We have destroyed every single argument against raising the minimum wage. They're gone. All you've got now is legislative game playing, and it's wrong.

I want a clean, straightforward bill to raise the minimum wage by a dollar over 2 years, and I intend to sign it.

Let me say to all of you, I am profoundly grateful for the prosperity our Nation enjoys today, grateful for the opportunity that our administration has had to play a role in it. But I will never be satisfied as long as there are people like Cheryl out there. I mean, what else can you ask this woman to do? She's kept her family together. Her husband has a disability. She's supporting four kids. She's going to school full time. Now, how can Congress justify saying no to her? That's what I want to know.

Let's play games on another bill. They're going to pass a lot of other bills. Can't we put

the working people of this country first for a change here and put political games second?

I'd like to now introduce to speak the first of a series of Members of Congress, without whom this fight could never be waged. And I am profoundly grateful to Representative David Bonior for nearly 25 years of fighting for people like Cheryl Costas.

Congressman Bonior.

[At this point, Members of Congress made brief remarks.]

*The President.* Ladies and gentlemen, all that needs to be said has been said. But what needs to be done has not been done. So I ask you to leave here remembering the stirring words of our leaders in Congress and the profoundly moving story of Cheryl Costas. And just remember, there's a lot more people like her out there. Remember what Dick Gephardt told you: Just ask every Member of Congress to imagine how long they could live on the minimum wage.

This is the right thing to do. We're still here after over 220 years because when the chips are down, we mostly do the right thing, in spite of ourselves. Ask them to do the right thing.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:31 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to minimum wage earner Cheryl Costas, who introduced the President.

## Exchange With Reporters on Minimum Wage Legislation March 8, 2000

*The President.* Hi, Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International].

*Q.* Do you have the votes?

*The President.* We don't know yet.

*Q.* How are the votes going?

*The President.* We don't know yet. That's why we're here today. We're working it.

*Q.* You don't know?

*The President.* If we can get the right bill before them, we have the votes. I don't know

if we've got the votes to get the right bill before them, you know, to get through all the thicket of rulemaking. But we're working it.

NOTE: The exchange began at 11:09 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.