Society and Citizens

- We consider social obligations in terms of wage requirements and other benefits. Even if there were a living wage, society will have some people who are unfit to work and require care. A living wage, however, is likely to reduce the amount of public assistance required. It was pointed out that all public assistance is made possible through individual contributions.

- WAL-MART is a closely held company that pays the minimum wage and often encourages employees to use social services. Perhaps large corporations should be required to pay employees more than small businesses. One recent attempt to implement such a policy was Washington DC’s “living wage” requirement for large retailers. However this measure was vetoed by Washington D.C.’s mayor and the veto was not overturned.

- Some people argue that a minimum wage is fine as an introductory or training wage, but that there should be increases that are commensurate with experience and skill. For small businesses there are tax incentives for accelerating wage increases.

Low Income and Lifestyle Choices

- Some suggest that people who have a low income should not have children. However, family planning is also an expense, and those with limited incomes may be less able to afford birth control and the medical care for that effective family planning requires. It was noted that the responsibility and expense of birth control typically falls to women rather than men.
Who Makes Minimum Wage

- Typically people making the minimum wage are 16-24 but this age threshold is rising. The economic downturn resulted in more people of all ages accepting minimum wage jobs.

Language and Issue Framing

- The very term “living wage” suggests that if you oppose it you oppose someone earning a living. Rather than focusing on how much money people should receive, perhaps they should focus on living within their means. However, no matter how conservatively people manage their money, there is a baseline beneath which it is difficult to make ends meet.

Wages and Social Support and Subsidies

- Consider the following alternatives: increasing the minimum wage to a living wage, providing more social services, or providing an earned-income credit. These options raise at least two considerations. First, which is most efficient? Second, do people want to receive their income directly, or might they have an objection to receiving an indirect benefit such as an earned-income credit?

Why this is a Hot Topic

- One of the reason the issue of a living wage is relevant is that 1% of Americans now hold roughly 40% of the wealth, and this raises questions of wealth distribution and the opportunity to earn a living wage in American society. However minimum wage or living wage may not be the right strategy. The very idea may set expectations too low.