



World Blind Union
Union Mondiale Des Aveugles
Unión Mundial de Ciegos

May 18, 2017

Re: WBU Endorsement of the Raise the Wage Act

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bobby Scott
United States House of Representatives
1201 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
United States Senate
332 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Keith Ellison
United States House of Representatives
2263 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators Murray and Sanders and Congressmen Scott and Ellison:

I am writing on behalf of the World Blind Union (WBU) and the 285 million blind and partially sighted people around the world it represents. The WBU strongly supports the recently introduced Raise the Wage Act and wishes to commend you for introducing and championing such an important piece of legislation.

The WBU believes that all people must be guaranteed a living wage, and the Raise the Wage Act will do precisely that. We are particularly pleased that the bill includes people with disabilities.

For nearly nine decades, people with disabilities living in the United States have stood by while others were guaranteed a minimum wage. If there was justification for such an exclusion of basic rights, today it is anachronistic--the time has long passed when people with disabilities should be presumed to be unable to engage in productive work simply by virtue of having a disability. Phasing out Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act is an important step forward in recognizing and affirming the fundamental humanity and rights of people with disabilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), adopted twenty-seven years ago, is rooted in the proposition that disability is a normal part of the human experience, yet Section 14(c) contradicts this foundational principle. This conflict must be removed once and for all—people with disabilities cannot be fully participating members of society while simultaneously being presumed inferior under the law.

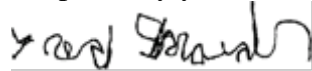
It is deeply ironic to consider that a blind man, Thomas Gore, represented the state of Oklahoma in the United States Senate from 1907 to 1921; yet just over a decade and a half later, in 1938, the Congress and President Roosevelt (a person with a significant disability) would deny people with disabilities protection under the Fair Labor Standards Act. Truly, the New Deal was the old deal for people with disabilities.

Senator Gore, known as the Blind Orator, was assisted in navigating the halls of Congress by his nephew, Eugene Louis Vidal, better known as Gore Vidal. In other words, Senator Gore was a person with a disability who was fully capable of carrying out his duties as a member of the United States Senate, while making use of a reasonable accommodation (more precisely a natural support), namely a guide.

Thank you Senators Murray and Sanders and Congressmen Scott and Ellison for introducing the Raise the Wage Act and for including people with disabilities under its protections. While the Raise the Wage Act will apply only to people in the United States, its symbolic power for people, including people with disabilities, around the world cannot be overstated. Blind people and others with disabilities suffer poverty and isolation, not as the natural and immutable consequence of their disability, but out of deeply held misconceptions and misapprehensions about people with disabilities and their capacity. The Raise the Wage Act will demonstrate to the world that the United States believes that all its citizens, including its citizens with disabilities, must be guaranteed a minimum wage sufficient to assure them a living wage and the dignity that emanates from the ability to support oneself and one's family.

Please know that the WBU sincerely and deeply appreciates your leadership and stands ready to support you in any way possible as this vital bill makes its way through the legislative process.

Respectfully yours,



Fredric K. Schroeder, Ph.D.
President
World Blind Union