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FLOOR DEBATE

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low-income workers over time. I want to respond to a number of the arguments that Senator Cunningham has made and Senator Smith has made, because I think there are excellent responses to all of those arguments. But I do want to go through the rest of the statutes, if I could, with you, on some things that I think, again, will help you get the dimensions of the debate and understand everything that we currently have in law. I would start out by noting that the \$5.15 has been in effect since September of 1997. So you have six years of inflation. And I know some of the material you've been getting says, well, it's a 25 percent increase, isn't that terrible? Well, if you start looking at it in terms of the incremental increase of inflation over that period of time, as indicated previously, the \$5.80, which is the first part of the bill, which is not stricken by Senator Foley, merely keeps up with inflation. And you know, it's a little bit like those people that don't want to pay legislators any more. And by the time we get around to raising the \$12,000 a year to something else, since it hasn't been changed for 15 years, people say, well, oh my god, it's a 100 percent increase. But what you have to look at is the purchasing power, I think, of what came before and the number of years that have passed. And doing that, you will understand that this no more, in its first part, and in its finality, if you accept Senator Foley's amendment, does no more than keep the minimum wage where it's been, in terms of purchasing power. I might also point out that a section of the bill we haven't changed has to do with persons who are compensated by gratuities. And it says an employer may pay wages at a minimum rate of \$2.13 plus all gratuities. We didn't change that \$2.13. That particular statute also points out that student learners, as a part of a program, can be paid 75 percent of the minimum wage. And so that's a dimension. And then beyond that, there is what's called a training wage. An employer may pay a new employee, who is younger than 20 years old and is not a seasonal or migrant worker, a training wage at a rate of \$4.25 an hour for 90 days from the point in time when they're hired. So that training wage is not changed by this bill. They still could, for a period of 90 days, pay \$4.25. I think those are the main things that I wanted to point out in terms of what the statute actually says. Now let me describe why I went further than just trying to keep up with inflation. I passed out three different