

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY THE CLERK OF THE LEGISLATURE
Transcriber's Office
FLOOR DEBATE

April 10, 2006 LB 554

precaution here. If you want your young people to at least have somewhere to work, it's going to be difficult, much more difficult than it would have been before. I supported this on General File. I certainly hope I can support it on Select File.

SENATOR BAKER PRESIDING

SENATOR BAKER: Time.

SENATOR JANSSEN: We'll see what happens.

SENATOR BAKER: Thank you, Senator Janssen. Senator Beutler.

SENATOR BEUTLER: Senator Baker, members of the Legislature, we have been through, at some length before, the pros and the cons of this. Let me remind me, though, that the minimum wage hasn't been increased for nine years. Since the beginning of the minimum wage, since this country established the idea that, you know, we ought to be paying the people at the bottom enough to pay their own way so we don't have to do food stamps, so we don't have to do housing, so we don't have to do Medicaid so much, so they can pay for themselves, and now the actual purchasing power of the minimum wage, even if you adopt this bill, is going to be way lower than it was in the 1970s and 1980s. That's how badly it's deteriorated. Since it was passed...since the last increase was passed nine years ago--there's been no increase since nine years ago--since then there are still 16,000 families in this state that are making their way on minimum wage. So at some point in time, you just have to ask, what is fair here? The economic system doesn't always correct itself in this instance. In large part, if you looked at...if...the self mechanism of the economic system, you might have thought, well, as the labor pool goes down, wages will go up. That's the way it's supposed to work. But when the labor pool went down, what happened? We essentially imported hundreds of thousands of Latinos in to maintain the situation of artificially cheap labor. So we didn't allow the economic system to work. We manipulated the economic system. But at this point in time, that's not the question before us. At this point in time, the question is one of simple justice. How long are you going to let these people go further and further into