

Living wage must be concern of next MU president

Empowered Perspective

MU Student – OpEd – 11.8.05

By: Emily Brown

At the Oct. 25 ASG Senate meeting, members of the presidential search committee were present to gather student input on the matter of our future president. Amid proposals for a president more dedicated to fostering school spirit and enlivening the student union, Anne Towne, representative of the Western community, stepped up to voice our administration's need for a presidential candidate committed to providing a living wage for all its employees.

Towne is not alone on our campus - advocacy for a living wage for all university employees is the centerpiece of the group Students for Staff (SFS). Unlike previous student labor organizations which focused on particular employment sectors, SFS supports the adoption of "a blanket living wage policy as a constructive solution to the economic disparities on our campus" as stated on the SFS Web site (<http://www.orgs.muohio.edu/spj/sfs.htm>). While the rhetoric sounds appealing, what in Garland's name do they mean by a living wage?

The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) acknowledges a living wage as "the wage a full-time worker would need to earn to support a family above federal poverty line." As EPI puts it, a living wage can vary anywhere from \$6.25 to \$20 an hour depending on family size and the cost of living specific to location. Living wage is exactly what it says it is - a living, fluctuating concept denied to low-wage workers scraping by a living.

It is a concept that many local governments, such as those in Baltimore, New York City, Philadelphia, Sacramento and Orlando, and universities, such as Stanford and Harvard, have deemed credible enough to pass mandatory living wage ordinances. Places closer to home like Bloomington, Ind., Dayton, Ohio, Cincinnati, Ohio, and Louisville, Ky., have also chosen a living wage over the poverty-inducing federal minimum wage (<http://www.livingwagecampaign.org/>).

A living wage in Butler County calculates as \$13.50 for a single-parent home with one child up to \$19.66 for a two-parent home with two children (Living Wage Estimator, <http://www.livingwage.geog.psu.edu/>). Generally, the average wage for various professions in Butler County is "in the red" when compared against the living wage, particularly in sectors where a majority of Miami staff is employed, such as maintenance, food preparation and administrative support. In a university news brief published March 3, 2004 after negotiations with the union, Miami raised its starting wages from \$7.32 to \$8.50 an hour, a meager compromise, and a wage only sufficient enough to support a single adult living in Butler County.

Students, faculty and staff of Miami University are actively initiating a plan toward the

adoption of a living wage. The issue must be addressed by our administration and must be addressed in the search for a new president or Miami will risk being criticized in important matters of social justice. It is the responsibility of the Miami community to ensure that our employees do not live with the hardships such wage policies as those of Miami University impose upon our employees.

I will leave you with this final note, courtesy of SFS. "If you haven't already, get to know the person who cleans your bathroom, the person who serves you lunch," as well as the person who answers your phone calls to the English department, helps you force-add into a business class, or drives you home after a long day of class. Do not let our administration fool you - it is not the president or the provost who runs Miami, it is these folks who make everything happen. The least we can do is grant them the right and the means to live not in poverty but in security.