

## The Minimum Wage-and Other Left Ideas Washington Post Might Find “Lame”

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Gov. Scott Walker says the minimum wage is “lame”—and a Washington Post political analyst largely agrees with him. (photo: State of Wisconsin)

Just after announcing his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker denounced the left for not having any real ideas for workers. According to Walker:

They’ve just got really lame ideas, things like the minimum wage. Instead of focusing on that, we need to talk about how we give people the skills and the education, the qualifications they need to take on careers that pay far more than minimum wage.

In his Washington Post column The Fix ([7/14/15](#)), [Philip Bump](#) largely endorsed this perspective.

If the purpose the minimum wage is meant to serve is to lift people out of poverty, Pew points out that Walker’s right: Most minimum wages aren’t high enough to do that. The minimum wage is indeed lame, in the sense that it’s relatively impotent. Earning a minimum wage in 2014 was enough for a single person not to live in poverty, but not anyone with a family—and not everywhere across the country.



It would also mean having trade policies designed to reduce the trade deficit (i.e., a lower-valued dollar), which would provide a strong boost to jobs. It would also mean spending on infrastructure and education, which would also help to create jobs and have long-term growth benefits.

The left also favors policies that allow workers who want to be represented by unions to organize. This has a [well-known impact on wages](#), especially for less educated workers.

(It is worth noting that as governor of Wisconsin, Walker has targeted unions, trying to weaken them in both the public and private sectors. He has also attacked the University of Wisconsin, one of the top public universities in the country. Insofar as he is committed to a path of upward mobility for workers, these actions go in the opposite direction.)

As far the denunciation of the minimum wage as “lame,” this is a policy that could put thousands of dollars a year into the pockets of low-wage workers. For arithmetic fans, a three-dollar-an-hour increase in the minimum wage would mean \$6,000 a year for a full-year worker. Since Bump seems to prefer per household measures to per worker measures, if a household has two workers earning near the minimum wage, for a total of 3,000 hours a year, a three-dollar increase would imply \$9,000 in additional income. It’s unlikely these people would think of the minimum wage as “lame.”

The last point is that Bump apparently doesn’t realize that Walker’s focus on skills and education are not new, and are also shared by the left. The left has long led the way in pushing for public support for improved education. Even now, President Obama has put proposals forward for universal pre-K education and reducing the cost of college. Unions have not only supported education in the public sector, they routinely require training and upskilling of workers in their contracts.

If Walker has some new ideas on skills and education, then it would be worth hearing them, but Bump gives no indication that Walker did anything other than say the words as a way to denounce the left. In short, if Bump had more knowledge about history and current politics, he would not join Walker in his name-calling.

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