

This week, over 15 members of the Vermont Legislature are taking the Minimum Wage Challenge, a challenge to live on \$10.50 for an entire week. Growing up in Franklin County, an area of Vermont where too many families struggle to get by, I've seen first hand how low wages takeaway opportunities and hold hard working folks down to a certain lifestyle, a lifestyle that is not fair for those who have chosen to work, I've heard the expression "Pull yourself up by the bootstraps" but yet in Vermont when people want to do just that they are expected to work for a wage that can barely keep the roof over your head, or put food on the table.

While the local republicans keep pushing an affordability tagline that leads to us cutting the very services working families so desperately need. Instead of helping workers out by Raising the Wage they would rather hold a forum that is stacked with lobbyists from the VGA, like Representative Parent held a few weeks ago, instead of investing in local employees and treating them as human they would rather degrade them are citizens such as Randy Brock did a few weeks ago when he said " chastising those who put forth the effort to get a job

I've worked hard all my life, because I believe in people, and want to help everyone who is struggling to get by I know that if we engage in our political system we can channel it to serve the needs of our community.

Being a member of Rights & Democracy which is one of the leaders of the Raise the Wage Coalition I have seen and heard the stories first hand of those who tried to live on the low wages while working because I know we need to organize in our communities to pressure our elected officials to support issues that really matter to working families. Issues like raising the minimum wage, like enacting a statewide paid family and medical leave program, like moving toward universal healthcare and investing in mental health and drug prevention treatment instead of incarceration.

I know what it's like to live below poverty wages, and I know by raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour in Vermont, *as soon as possible*, we will lift tens of thousands of Vermonters out of poverty. My well being, and my families and neighbors well being, are tied together, and if we raise standards for our working families we will all benefit. All families that struggle to make ends meet, thousands of our neighbors that are still living paycheck to paycheck, day to day.

We need to do more to fight poverty in our state. When I think of poverty, I think of thousands of Vermont families that struggle with basic things such as food, gas and basic quality of life. When I think of poverty, I think of the many hours my mother would work as a traffic controller in the scorching heat and bitter cold just to feed her family. I think of the many times during a cold winter morning when I would wake up to the oven as our only source of heat, or how many times I've put my last \$3.00 for a week in my car, and hoped my way to making it to the next payday. Poverty is a cycle I know all too well, and I'm far from the only one.

Dustin Tanner