

U.S.A. : Fight for \$15 campaign is a comeback for labor movement's role in elections

Monday 29 October 2018, by [SAINATO Michael](#) (Date first published: 28 October 2018).

Campaign to increase the minimum wage has boosted its efforts ahead of elections, targeting low-income communities of color

When Zach Wiita's mother suffered a stroke and became disabled in 2012, he got a second job at a local movie theater to help cover her living costs. He lives outside of Washington DC, in Montgomery County, Maryland, one of the counties in the United States that has [begun](#) implementing their own minimum wage increases

"It's really hard to support yourself and someone you love on a working-class income, especially in Montgomery County, Maryland. It's really hard to believe in your future when you're down to your last \$25 between paychecks," Wiita said.

Wiita is one [tens of millions of workers](#) across the US who stand to benefit from the Fight for \$15 movement, a union-backed initiative to raise minimum wages even as the federal minimum wage has [remained](#) stuck at \$7.25 since 2009. Those campaigners are hoping stories like Wiita's will bring working class people and their supporters to the polls in November's midterm elections.

Wiita made \$9 an hour before Montgomery County began passing minimum wage increases. He now makes \$14.75 an hour and still supports his mother financially. "Every year, I had just a little bit more money in each paycheck. It gives you just that much more room to breathe, that much more safety if something goes wrong."

In 2017, Montgomery County [passed](#) a \$15 minimum wage law to take effect for large businesses by July 2022 and smaller businesses in 2023 and 2024, the first jurisdiction in Maryland to do so.

The Trump administration and state governments dominated by Republicans have scaled back the rights of workers to organize and refused to support minimum wage increases. In response to the continued [stagnation](#) of wages and lack of political support from Republicans, the Fight for \$15 campaign, led by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), is working to boost turnout ahead of the midterm vote.

"The Fight for \$15 is leading a canvassFight led by workers in 11 states in the weeks leading up to election day. The idea is to hit hundreds of thousands of doors across those 11 states around workers rights issues," said Asya Pikovsky, a spokesperson for the Fight for \$15 Campaign.

The states included in the canvassing efforts are Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Georgia, California, Florida, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Colorado, and Ohio.

The focus is based in the cradle of the American labor movement, the rust belt; particularly Michigan, and Wisconsin, where gubernatorial races will decide whether Republicans - [hostile](#) to the Fight for \$15 movement - will be kept in power, or Democrats will unseat them. Democratic candidates for governor in these states, [Gretchen Whitmer](#) (Michigan) and [Tony Evers](#) (Wisconsin), have supported increasing their state's minimum wage to \$15 an hour. The canvasses are targeting low-income communities of color, where voter turnout experienced significant [drops](#) in the 2016 election.

"That set of Democratic candidates are going to need support to pass a \$15 minimum wage and repeal right to work laws, and that's where the Fight for \$15 comes in," added Pikovsky. "With this canvass, we are seeing the comeback of labor's role in elections."

Activists have stepped up their campaign ahead of the elections. Some 99 people were arrested in Chicago, Milwaukee, and Detroit during a series of walkouts in early October.

"One of the key realities right now in our country is working at McDonald's is not a high school job anymore, it is now people's full-time position because our leadership is last in creating real jobs, jobs you can stay for 20 to 30 years and retire with a pension, many of the things our parents' generation was used to," Rashida Tlaib, the Democratic candidate for Michigan's 13th Congressional District - which overwhelmingly leans Democrat - told the Guardian.

Tlaib was one of [20 arrested](#) on October 2 during a walkout at a McDonald's in Detroit, Michigan in favor of a \$15 minimum wage and union rights.

McDonald's and the rest of the service industry have held out from paying their workers a \$15 minimum wage, even as [Disney](#), [Target](#), [Amazon](#), and several [cities](#), [counties](#), and state governments - including [New York](#), [Massachusetts](#), [California](#), and [Washington DC](#) - have passed minimum wage laws and policies.

Since the 2016 election, the Democratic Party has shifted to the left after they formally [included](#) a \$15 minimum wage in their party platform due to pressure from labor unions and senator Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential campaign. In May 2017, Sanders [introduced](#) a bill to increase the federal minimum wage, which 30 Senate Democrats signed on to support, compared to just five Senate Democrats in 2015. In the House, 171 Democrats [signed](#) onto the companion bill and Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi [pledged](#) to pass a \$15 federal minimum wage in the first 100 hours of the next Congress if Democrats regain control of the House this November.

"As Trump and Republicans continue to attack the rights and livelihoods of American workers while rewarding the rich and big corporations, Democrats will always stand with the American labor movement," said DNC spokesperson Daniel Wessel in an email to the Guardian. The current [DNC platform](#) includes support for a minimum wage of at least \$15 an hour.

The Republican National Committee and National Republican Congressional Committee did not respond to multiple requests for a comment on the party's official stance on a \$15 minimum wage increase.

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