

Minimum wage an ongoing issue

By Eleazar David Melendez, Huffington Post

Even as he'd confidently promised before television cameras in January that he would deliver an astounding increase in the minimum wage, the president knew it would be a difficult fight. Unprecedented federal debt and thorny unemployment weighed heavily on Washington, both cautioning against forcing businesses to give low-paid workers a raise.

The president's own top economic expert had told him the government shouldn't further distort the dynamics of the free market. Big business was adamantly against the plan.

And Congress? That lot of obstructionist conservatives and their "do nothing" attitude would relish any chance to get in the administration's way, especially if its members could call him a "socialist" and once again bring up his controversial universal health care plan.

So it was in 1949, when President Harry Truman declared the federal minimum wage ought to be nearly doubled, from 40 cents an hour to 75 cents. Using a measure of what minimum-wage earners could purchase with that amount compared with the rest of society, the 1949 increase is roughly the equivalent of a wage today jumping to \$10.70 from \$5.70.

As labor activists across the U.S. begin a round of Labor Day strikes this week in a bid to increase the wages of low-paid workers, raising the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$15 has become a rallying cry of the boldest proposals. With most political forecasters declaring President Obama's more modest call for a minimum wage raise to \$9 dead in the water, the idea of more than doubling the minimum wage is generally dismissed as fanciful.

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