

Center for American Progress



A SCREENING AND DISCUSSION OF THE FILM:

30 DAYS

MODERATOR:

**JOHN PODESTA,
PRESIDENT AND CEO,
CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS**

FEATURING:

**SENATOR EDWARD KENNEDY,
(D-MA)**

**STEVEN KEST,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ACORN**

**ALEXANDRA JAMIESON,
HOLISTIC HEALTH COUNSELOR;
PARTICIPANT, *30 DAYS***

**MORGAN SPURLOCK,
CREATOR, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER,
AND HOST, *30 DAYS***

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(Applause.)

JOHN PODESTA: Most of you know that Morgan received an Academy Award nomination for his work on *Super Size Me*, and I think probably right out of Hollywood he and Alex went to Columbus, Ohio, and began work on this terrific new series called *30 Days* which does – again, explores social problems in America. And he brings a – and they both bring their – an artist's eye and a view towards both looking at real problems that America faces today, and I think inspires us all really actually to do something about it, which is hopefully what will be the result of this new show.

For those of you who don't know, the national minimum wage has not been raised since 1997. The person who led the fight to make that happen in 1997 is Senator Ted Kennedy, who's here with us tonight. (Applause.) And every year since then, Senator Kennedy has led that fight; tried to get national legislation going to raise the minimum wage. He's been thwarted by a determined leadership in our current Congress, but he keeps fighting because there's no greater champion for working people in the United States Congress today than Ted Kennedy, and we really welcome him to be here.

And I want to extend my thanks also to our cosponsors in this event: FX, who are bringing the show to the air; and ACORN, the – we'll hear from Steve Kest, the executive director, and from Morgan and Alex after you've seen the show. But ACORN is, if you will, the boots on the ground. They really spearheaded the fight to raise the minimum wage in Florida, and for that the people in Florida are getting a \$1.00 an hour wage last month, so they do tremendous work across the country. They're working now in Ohio to raise the state minimum wage.

But we do need federal legislation, and for that we're going to need the continued leadership of Senator Kennedy. He's got to get back to the Senate, but he said he would offer us a few words this evening.

Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR EDWARD KENNEDY: Well, thank you very much. (Applause.) First of all, to John Podesta, who comes from a wonderful family that's been long-time committed to public service. He's now the president for the Center for American Progress. He's my kind of president. And I'm glad to be with him. I've been his friend and admirer, and he's an enormous source of help and assistance for all of us in the Congress whether it's issues on minimum wage or the domestic policies, foreign policies. So we want to thank John for his continued service in terms of making this country a fairer and more just America.

Morgan and Alex, we thank you. You have done on film what many of us try to do by speaking, but you've been a lot more effective, and we want to thank you so much. You are really putting a mirror to America's face on so many of these social issues, and that's just something that's not done, hasn't been done, and you've been creative enough and willing enough to do it. We admire you both so much for all you do and for all of the great service to our country. We thank both of you. (Applause.)

Let me just thank you for being here. I join John Podesta in paying a tribute to ACORN. I've had the opportunity to be out on various primary states and campaigns, and ACORN has got an agenda that's short, but it should be America's agenda. And they are a very involved, active group. If you want to become associated with a grassroots group that is hardworking, dedicated, and committed in the cause of social justice in this country, you don't do better than working with ACORN, so I congratulate all of them. Those that are here, as John has mentioned, what a difference they've made in the last election on advancing the minimum wage in two important states and now out in the grassroots are doing the similar work in other states.

And the work that they have done in terms of the living wage – we have communities in Boston and Cambridge who have living wage, other communities that have the living wage, all of this is really a reflection of the fact that the Congress in the last seven years, on seven different occasions, have voted themselves pay increases, but have been unwilling to vote for an increase for men and women that are the bottom rung of the economic ladder. They have voted themselves \$27,000 in pay increases, and still there are individuals in that body that have the audacity to vote against – as they did just a few short weeks ago, against any kind of increase in the minimum wage. They say, “Well, this is really going to rob us of jobs. Jobs are difficult.” Well, we batted that down time in and time out with all the times historically that we've raised the minimum wage and it's virtually had absolutely no impact in terms of employment, even in terms of teenage employment.

They talk about the impact in terms of inflation, and when you look at it, the increase of a dollar that we are talking about, or \$1.25 in the increase the minimum wage over the period over the next year and a half. We're talking about two-tenths of 1 percent of the total wages paid in the country. So this is really an expression: the opposition is really an ideological special interest and a (clearer?) declaration about greed as there is in the country, and I say that very sincerely.

Let me just – (applause) – and I'm not going to take much time, but I'm going to mention two or three very, very important points. One, who are the recipients of the minimum wage? First of all, they are men and women of dignity. Men and women that are receiving the minimum wage are still out there, ready to do a day's work. Men and women of great pride, that even though they're not receiving more than the minimum wage still have a great deal of dignity and pride. They are the people that work in nursing homes, that take care of a generation's senior citizens that have retired. We say we care about elderly. People are talking about Social Security. They're talking about pensions. They're talking about what we're going to do in terms of prescription drugs.

What about those people that are out there taking care of parents; parents who have sacrificed for their kids? Many of those individuals in the nursing home are minimum wage workers.

They are the people that clean out the great buildings of American commerce every single night. They're teacher's aids; people that work with children. We talk about children being our future. We talk about investing in our children. What are we going to do about children? Well, there a lot of minimum wage workers that are working as teacher's aids, and they haven't gotten any increase. We care about our seniors, we care about our children? We're not looking out after men and women of dignity.

Finally, let me just say that this is a women's issue because the majority of the individuals that receive the minimum wage are women. It's a children's issue because a majority of the women that are receiving the minimum wage have children. So it's a women's issue and it's a children's issue. So it's a family issue. It's a values issue. You talk about families? You talk about values? You can't talk about them without an increase in the minimum wage.

And it's a civil rights issue because those that are receiving the minimum wage are men and women of color. The great majority are men and women of color. It's a civil rights issue, a children's issue, a women's issue, and most of all a fairness issue. And if there's one thing that the American people understand, it's fairness. And the American people believe that anyone that is going to work 40 hours a week, 52 weeks of the year in the United States of America that has the strongest economy in the world should not have to live in poverty. It is a disgrace. That's what this issue is about. (Applause.)

Thanks for being here. Good to see you. Good. (Applause.)

MR. PODESTA: Thank you, Senator.

Alex and Morgan will be available to take some questions after the show, but let's watch the show.

(Break for screening of *30 Days*.)

MR. PODESTA: Morgan Spurlock is from West Virginia. We were talking earlier, one of the next shows –

MR. : Woo! Represent.

(Cross talk.)

MR. PODESTA: We've got a few representatives of West Virginia here. One of the next shows he gets one of his childhood friends to live the life of a Muslim in Dearborn, Michigan, from West Virginia, which is also a terrific show. As I said earlier,

he was nominated for the Academy Award for *Super Size Me*. He's also got a book out called *Don't Eat This Book* and which picks up where *Super Size Me* left off, and it reveals, I think, how the film affected consumers and the fast food industry.

Alexandra Jamieson is a holistic health counselor and personal chef. She was the vegetarian chef at Paul Newman's Hole in the Wall Camp in the summer of 2002, and has a new book out, *The Great American Detox Diet*, based on the diet she fed Morgan following his *Super Size Me* experience. (Laughter.) And if any of you saw that, you know that's got to be a mighty powerful diet to get him out from under that experience.

Steve Kest is the executive director of ACORN, and he got introduced by Senator Kennedy before, but again, Steve has been at it for a very long time doing remarkable work with a terrific organization.

We're going to take questions from the audience, but let me first start by just asking Morgan and Alex a question which is why did you decide, Morgan, to start on the minimum wage, and Alex, how did he talk you into doing it with him? (Laughter.)

MORGAN SPURLOCK: Well, the original idea when I took the series – I took the idea for the series to FX – you know, the goal was to create a show where, like *Super Size Me*, we could deal with social issues on a weekly basis in an entertaining way and an engaging way and hopefully in a way that would make people think after they saw the show.

When I first pitched the show to them, I said, "And what will happen is every week I'll go out, and I'll go through these 30-day journeys. It will be me doing these every single week." And they said, "That's a great idea," and then I went home and told Alex. I said, "Yeah, and so I'm going to do all these, and we'll shoot them and it will take six months." And Alex said, "You're not going to have a girlfriend very long if you do that." (Laughter.) And so, I said, "Well, how about if we do one?" And she said, "If you're going away for 30 days, then I'm coming with you." So I conned her in early into coming.

And for me when we started going through – because we had a whole laundry list of issues that we wanted to tackle with the show and minimum wage was one at the top. I mean, originally the idea started off with exploring homelessness, but as we started just talking about that, there's millions more people that are effected by minimum wage than there are with homelessness in America and so that just kind of was the genesis.

MR. PODESTA: Alex?

ALEXANDRA JAMIESON: I volunteered. (Laughter.)

MR. PODESTA: You volunteered. And Morgan said at the end it – *30 Days* – changed him. How about you?

MS. JAMIESON: Definitely. I mean, I watched my pennies before, but now I really think about where I spend my money. Every dollar you spend is a vote. You decide what companies you believe treat their workers well, and what kind of products they offer, so I just think about those things even more now. And I tip better.
(Laughter.)

MR. PODESTA: Excellent. Important – an important lesson to be learned tonight. Tip better. Steve – I think we’re going to get some mikes working the audience., but, Steve, tell us what’s going on in Ohio. Morgan and Alex just spent 30 days in Ohio. What’s going on? What’s happening in the election in 2006?

STEVEN KEST: Yeah, it was really great. It was great to see the film. It was a tremendous job you guys did.

ACORN is an organization of low-income citizens and non-citizens, really, all over from around the country with chapters in 85 cities around the country. Many of our members are minimum wage – living on minimum wage, supporting families going through the same situation as we saw in this film. We have chapters in Ohio, in Columbus, in Cleveland, and this year we’re starting up a campaign in that state to raise the minimum wage by ballot initiative. We’ve done this before. Last year in Florida we collected a million signatures, put a measure on the ballot, the advance state to raise the minimum wage by a dollar above the federal and then index it to inflation so it will keep going up. And that measure passed by 71 percent. We got more votes than George W. Bush did in Florida in November ’04. We hope to do the same thing in Ohio and several other states as well: Michigan and Arizona.

We have a measure that will be on the ballot if we collect enough signatures in Ohio to raise the minimum wage to \$7.15. Many of our members making minimum wage are – we’ll soon be starting to collect those signatures, get this thing on the ballot, and people taking action on their own behalf to raise the minimum wage, which I think is really the solution or part of the solution that this problem that was laid out in the film.

MR. PODESTA: So, questions from the audience, I think we’ll probably get Ronald McDonald in a track suit, but we’ll start with maybe up here.

Q: (Explain to me?) what I do already which is – (off mike) –

MR. PODESTA: Can you maybe wait for a second and we’ll pass –

MR. : We can repeat the question.

Q: All right. Would you think about taking – (off mike)? It’s expensive being poor. Did you think about doing a payday loan?

MR. SPURLOCK: Payday loans were something we discussed. I just want to introduce somebody who’s here. There was a guy who went through this whole thing

with us behind the scenes that you don't see while we're doing this. I wasn't actually producing the show, and Al LaGarde (ph) was the field producer who was there with us, and he's here tonight. So I just want to thank Al and recognize him. (Applause.)

Yeah. He's already here in D.C. working on another show for Discovery. This is the first time he's seen it, so –

MS. JAMIESON: I'm surprised he wants to be around us at all anymore. (Laughter.)

MR. SPURLOCK: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. But we thought about taking a payday loan, and we explored that, but we wanted to try to not have to do that unless we absolutely had to, and for us it was trying to avoid that. Payday loans – predatory lenders are one of the biggest things that really prey on poor people – on working poor people. Not only them, but Rent-a-Centers – there was a whole group of stores that we explored, which in 44 minutes – that's the problem with a 44-minute TV show; there's just not a lot you can get in there. And so the whole goal for us is just like with the DVD to the film, is the DVD to the series, that we're going to be putting out is going to be packed full of so much more stuff that I think will just be really educational beyond even the show.

MR. PODESTA: Okay, I think we're going to just shout out the questions and then we'll repeat them if people can't hear them. Why don't we just stay right there.

Q: Well, I'll just quickly – I – with the Food and Commercial Worker's Union, do you ever want to be a (unintelligible) undocumented Indian working in a (meat packing?) (unintelligible), just let us know. (Laughter.) (Unintelligible) has the greatest rate of workplace injuries (off mike).

MR. SPURLOCK: I'll make sure and get your number before I leave. (Laughter.) He said he works for the Union of – what is it? Which union?

Q: The Food and Commercial –

MR. SPURLOCK: The Food and Commercial Worker's Union. He said, if I ever want to be an undocumented laborer in a meat packing factory, call him up. (Laughter.) And I said, "Sign me up." (Laughter.) So that sounds like season two right there.

MR. PODESTA: Yeah.

MR. SPURLOCK: Right. (Laughter.)

MR. PODESTA: The highest rate of workplace injuries in the country. Lady in the back.

Q: Hi. Thank you very much for this film. It was very (off mike) Americans have – they have amnesia, so what are you doing for sustainability and to get people to remember this when they vote?

MR. SPURLOCK: Well, I mean, the biggest goal for me is things like this. We're here today. We're going to be having other screenings across the country. It premieres tomorrow night on FX at 10 o'clock. If it's important to you guys, you should tell your friends, you should tell family members, you should tell members of Congress, lobbyists. You guys are the people who are really going to make the difference here in Washington. So if it's something that's important to you, I really suggest you get the word out to the people around town that can really, really make the difference here.

One of the things that I think that I've seen after the movie and that I think is important for this show is we all have this wonderful idea that somebody else is going to fix the problem. We all just think, well, somebody else will take care of it. What can I do? I'm just one person. We live in this world of complacency where we don't really feel empowered enough to go out there and make a change. And what we all need to realize – me, everybody up here, you guys – is that it is up to us. It is up to you to make a decision about how you spend your money, where you go, who you're going to support in elections, how you're going to get this message out there to other people. It's something that does have to start on a grassroots level and has to swell. So it's not just me; it's you as well.

MR. PODESTA: We'll take one or two more and then we'll go on to the reception, but I do want to recognize Morgan mentioned the fact that we got to get this out to – this word out to members of Congress, and a great congresswoman from California, Congresswoman Lois Capps is sitting up there. (Applause.) And I know she'll help us get the word to her colleagues. I think we had a question over here. Go ahead.

Q: Yeah. The Congresswoman and the Democrats like Senator Kennedy, I mean, they're all really terrific (ones?) (off mike). That's just what I was going to suggest. We have to get some of these Republicans – of course the president will never be with us. I mean, he's so extreme (off mike) –

MR. : Yeah.

Q: – but I think there are some reasonable (off mike). I don't know if you doing this already, but maybe suggest that we get a copy of this movie to everyone in Congress so they can see there's really (off mike).

MR. PODESTA: Thank you.

MR. SPURLOCK: Yeah, thank you. We actually talked about that before the screening tonight, and we're going to work with the Center for American Progress, and

we're going to get it out there to every member of Congress and every member of the Senate.

(Applause.)

MR. PODESTA: One last one? In the back. Or in the middle tier there.

MR. SPURLOCK: That gentleman.

MR. PODESTA: Yeah.

Q: I was just wondering (off mike).

MR. SPURLOCK: I'll let Alex answer that question. (Laughter.)

MR. PODESTA: Did you feel unsafe living in the neighborhood?

MS. JAMIESON: Yeah, it was a little sketchy to be told, "Yeah, just a few days ago, the downstairs apartment was a crack den, and there was a homeless guy living in here and here's your key." (Laughs.) The door jiggles a little bit. You know, it wasn't – it didn't feel very secure, and we were very lucky, and our neighbors seemed to be pretty cool. We didn't have a lot of interaction with them because it was so cold, nobody really goes outside at that time of year. But I did have a couple of sketchy encounters. I mean, I was walking to work very early in the morning. It was still dark. There weren't a lot of people out, but I was lucky to have the camera crew with me most of the time, but every once in a while there's some freak out there who just wants to prey on somebody, so –

MR. SPURLOCK: It is interesting. You see the couple that was next door to us, I think it's Reggie and Susan, were the two guys that you see. It started warm up towards the end of our month and they had their lawn chairs sitting outside on the balcony, and we spoke to them, and this, once again, is something else that didn't make it in the show, but he just got out of the hospital about a week before, a week and a half before, and had pneumonia and some other function. He started to have a lot of liver problems. He was an ex-military, a Vietnam vet who was exposed to all sorts of chemical agents while he was there, and now is having massive health problems that he's not being covered for. And so he went to the hospital and just got out and showed me his bill, his \$35,000 hospital bill, which how's he going to pay? You know, because how's he going to pay that? And so for – when you meet people like that for me, and you start to see what's happening and the number one cause of bankruptcy in the United States is healthcare costs, you know, that's a really disturbing fact for us to be, as I said in the show, the "richest country in the world."

MR. PODESTA: Well, thank you, Morgan, and thank you, Alex, for the bravery and the vision and the artistry with which you presented that. I want to thank Steve for the work he's doing and that all the people in ACORN are doing around the country, and I want to thank FX for having the courage to put this on the air. We look forward to

seeing it on television tomorrow night at 10:00. There are a few things now that we can watch on television (laughter) that won't make our skin crawl. (Laughter). And thank you all for being with us to help launch this really important show and this important new series.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. SPURLOCK: Thank you.

(END)