

Subminimal Morality

August 18, 2021

He's been at the job fourteen years. Congress may kill it.

Matt Thibodeau has disabilities that severely limit how productive he can be and thus how much he can contribute to the bottom line of his employer, Associated Production Services.

Under a longstanding exception to the federal minimum wage, Matt is paid \$3.40 an hour for tasks like shrink-wrapping and assembling packages. The rate makes his employment feasible. (The current federal minimum is \$7.25.)

Any mandatory minimum wage discourages employers from hiring persons not yet productive enough to justify the cost of being employed at the dictated minimum.

Some congressmen want to scrap this exception to the mandatory minimum, calling it unfair and “out of date.”

“I felt like they were being targeted because they couldn't speak for themselves,” says Matt's mom, “and so that made us parents even more determined to speak for them.”



What's out of date, or was never justified to begin with, is Congress's federal minimum wage regulation.

Any mandatory minimum wage discourages employers from hiring persons not yet productive enough to justify the cost of being employed at the dictated minimum. It prevents low-skilled workers — on the outs of the economy — from getting a foot in the door.

Some employees initially paid only a few dollars an hour will soon improve their productivity and earn a higher wage. Others, like Matt, simply cannot advance further but can provide steady, conscientious labor within the compass of their abilities.

That's fine. Each party to such an arrangement benefits. And his work enables Matt to be productive and valued, which is tremendously important to him.

As it is important to all of us.

This is Common Sense. I'm Paul Jacob.