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Subject: Raising wages and more: Local Progress this month
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Cities Lead on Raising Wages

Workers rally in cities across the country demanding a minimum wage raise.

As the country slowly recovers from the recession, many workers are still struggling just to get by, working low-wage jobs to support their families. In the past, most minimum wage standards have been passed by Congress and state legislatures. But recently, as conservatives have captured many state legislatures and the US House, the momentum for increasing the minimum wage has begun to shift to municipalities.

This year, advocates and elected officials in cities across the country are fighting for an increase to the minimum wage. Washington, DC raised the minimum wage to $11.50. Los Angeles and Seattle are considering increasing their minimum wage to around $15, which would be the highest in the country. In March, a minimum wage increase will be on the Chicago ballot, thanks to organizations like the Action Now Institute. San Diego, San Francisco, Oakland, and Richmond, CA are also looking at increasing the minimum wage. New York City advocates are seeking authorization from NY State to set a higher city minimum wage. And now that cities have paved the way, states like Delaware, Illinois, Michigan, and Maryland are also considering a minimum wage increase.

Local Progress wants to support cities and towns looking to increase their minimum wage. If you're interested in talking to someone about legislation, support, and campaigning around this issue, please click here.

Momentum on Paid Sick Days

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New Brief: Improving Internet Access

Download the latest policy brief

All across the nation, communities are limited to internet access that is unreliable, slow, and

Continues in NYC and Newark

Local Progress' Josie Duffy stands with New Jerseyans for earned sick days.

After a 2013 that saw progress on workers' rights to paid sick days in cities across the country, the first month of 2014 suggests that this year will be even better.

On Jan. 28, the city of Newark, NJ became the nation's seventh municipality to enact paid sick days. The Newark City Council passed a robust law that guarantees paid sick days to all workers, regardless of the size of their employer.

Earlier this month on Jan. 17, New York City Mayor **Bill de Blasio** and City Council Speaker **Melissa Mark-Viverito**, both Local Progress members, stood together and announced legislation that will significantly expand the city's law, providing important protections to hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers and improving the city's public health.

The proposed expansion would give paid leave to all workers whose employers have at least five or more employees, eliminate the long phase-in period, and close a loophole that exempted manufacturing workers. The expansion will cover an additional 240,000 workers who are currently eligible only for unpaid leave and 60,000 workers who would have otherwise had to wait until 2015 for their paid leave benefits to kick in. The City Council is expected to vote on the bill in the coming weeks.

"This City Hall is going be on the side of working families all over this city," said Mayor de Blasio, as he announced the measure.

Litigation Reveals Wall Street's Influence Over Housing Policy

Over the past half a decade, millions of homes have been foreclosed on due to harmful Wall Street practices. Many of these struggling families have looked to the government, only to find federal and state policies that simply haven't been strong enough to provided widespread relief. Now, as cities like Richmond, CA lead the way on foreclosure prevention policy, the federal government is threatening to stand in their way.

In October, the Center for Popular Democracy, along with ten other groups, filed a Freedom of Information Act Request seeking all communications between the major Wall Street banks and the Federal Housing Finance Association (FHFA) about the plans of cities like Richmond to reduce foreclosures and debt through the use of eminent domain. After the FHFA failed to respond to the request, the ACLU and the Center for Popular Democracy sued the FHFA.

As reported by *The Nation* last week, the litigation has revealed documents showing intimate ties between members of Wall Street's elite lobbyists and top officials who set housing policy, including numerous friendly emails from one of Wall Street's primary lobbying arms – the Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association

expensive. In many places there is little competition from internet providers, meaning that companies can overcharge for bad service. This lack of quality internet access has serious implications for economic and educational development and equity.

Local Progress has teamed up with the Institute for Local Self-Reliance on a policy brief that discusses the best strategies for improving municipal Internet access. The brief discusses the problems with the way Internet is currently provided and highlights a variety of solutions and innovative strategies that cities should consider. For more information on how cities can invest in their technological future and provide affordable, high quality Internet access, please click here.

Austin, TX and Madison, WI Defend Women's Rights

Last year, the Texas state legislature enacted unprecedented restrictions to abortion access. This year, three members of the Austin City Council, including Local Progress member **Laura Morrison**, are fighting back.

Morrison and her colleagues have publicly supported the Women's Health Protection Act, a proposed federal statute that would ban any state restrictions on abortion services, thereby making the Texas restrictions illegal. They have also written a letter to Congress to offer official support for the Act, which stated, "It is our duty to

(SIFMA) – to top agency officials at the FHFA.

Ed Demarco, the former acting-head of the FHFA, was known for his cozy relationship with the banks and his threats to take action against policies that could help stem the tide of foreclosures. But wasn't until the Senate majority's decision late last year to eliminate filibusters that Congressman Mel Watt was finally able to replace the pro-Wall Street DeMarco on January 6.

Advocates hope that the new leadership at FHFA will prioritize the needs of homeowners over the profit margins of the big banks and will permit localities to pursue principal reduction strategies free from threats.

Please contact Local Progress if you're interested in local foreclosure prevention or principal reductions strategies.

Spotlight: Local Progress Members

Melissa Mark-Viverito Elected Speaker of the New York City Council

Local Progress Board Member Melissa Mark-Viverito was recently elected as the Speaker of the New York City Council, adding even more strength to the city's progressive leadership. Mark-Viverito is the first Puerto Rican and Latina to hold a citywide elected position, and represents the 8th district, including El Barrio/East Harlem and the South Bronx.

Speaker Mark-Viverito was born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Her late father was a physician and her mother was the founder of a feminist group in Puerto Rico. Mark-Viverito attended college at Columbia, and spent the years following college mentoring young Latinos and working for SEIU 1199, which represents hundreds of thousands of health care workers. Her experiences fed her propensity towards direct action and political activism. She beat an incumbent councilmember in 2005 and focused on advocating for gay rights, immigration, and labor.

On the Council, Mark-Viverito has been known for being both progressive and pragmatic, challenging the former administration from the left. In her campaign to build a majority coalition of NYC Council behind a progressive platform, Mark-Viverito partnered with Local Progress Board Member **Brad Lander**, whose leadership and vision was recently profiled by the *New York Times*. As Speaker, she wants to continue advancing a robust agenda for working-class New Yorkers.

"I will continue to be collaborative, and that's my inclination," she told the *New York Times*. "But I'm also someone who is not afraid to be protect constituents. Austin residents and those who may come to Austin should have access to safe, legal reproductive health care." Austin currently houses four women's health facilities that provide abortions.

Local Progress member **Lisa Subeck**, an Alderwoman in Madison, WI, has announced that she has majority support from her colleagues to create a mandatory buffer zone at certain health facilities, including abortion clinics.

This buffer zone is intended to protect patients, doctors, and other employees from aggressive protestors who often harass and intimidate women who are seeking reproductive services, while still protecting the First Amendment rights of the protestors.

The law would ban protesters from being within 8 feet of a person on public property within a 160-foot-protective zone, and comes at an interesting time: buffer zones at abortion clinics are the subject of a new case to be heard this year by the US Supreme Court.

Eugene Plans Divestment from Fossil Fuels

The Eugene City Council has unanimously decided to create a divestment policy, reducing city funds investments in oil, coal and natural gas companies.

The council, including Local Progress member **Betty Taylor**, has asked the City Manager to construct a policy that would ban the city from

strong and firm."

investing in companies with holdings in fossil fuels, such as ExxonMobil. The policy will also request that the state not invest in such companies on behalf of public employees.

Eugene was forced to get creative in its divestment policy, since state law does not allow cities to own direct stock. However, the city is an indirect investor through its membership in a state-sponsored investment pool. The city has $37 million dollars in the pool, about $526,000 of which is invested in oil, gas, and coal.

Local Progress is a national municipal policy network. For more information please visit www.localprogress.org

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