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Flagstaff Living Wage Coalition Launches Citizen Initiative to Raise the Minimum Wage to $15 per Hour over Five Years

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FLAGSTAFF – On Friday, April 1, 2016, *Flagstaff Needs a Raise*—a newly formed political committee that came out of a 15-month long planning and organizing effort of the Flagstaff Living Wage Coalition—began collecting signatures from Flagstaff voters to place a citizen initiative on the November ballot. The proposed amendment to the City Code would gradually raise the minimum wage from the current rate of $8.05 per hour to $15 per hour by January 1, 2021. The Initiative would also raise the wages for tipped workers to the full minimum wage by January 1, 2026. The City of Flagstaff would be responsible for enforcing the provisions of the Initiative.

In just one weekend, the campaign collected over 500 signatures out of more than 2,500 needed to qualify for the November ballot—an effort reflecting that the issue of addressing stagnating wages resonates with Flagstaff voters.

“This is an idea whose time is long overdue” said spokesperson Frankie Beesley. “Thirty-eight percent of the jobs in Flagstaff pay under $15 per hour. The overall poverty rate is 25 percent and the rate for children is 27 percent. That is primarily because of low wages, not lack of hard work. It is clear that FLAGSTAFF NEEDS A RAISE and this Initiative will do just that.”

In this effort, Flagstaff joins ten other cities around the nation and the states of California, New York, and New Jersey, who have, or are seeking, a $15 per hour minimum wage.

"If I can do it as a small business owner, then the larger companies can, too. It's about doing what's right," responded Beth Heenan, owner of Village Baker in Flagstaff to the question if a higher minimum wage would be problematic for her business operation.

Vance Peterson, a local general contractor added: “I have not hired anybody for less than $15 an hour in years. Paying people decent wages makes business sense—you get more loyal employees who are not stressed out about their lives as much because they can afford living in Flagstaff and the turnover is lower. Plus more people are able to invest in home improvement projects and business revenues go up.”

Among other early supporters of the initiative are organizations like Friends of Flagstaff’s Future and Living United for Change in Arizona and City of Flagstaff council candidates Jim McCarthy and Adam Shimoni.

At noon, April 4, the Flagstaff Needs a Raise campaign will hold a press conference on the Coconino County Courthouse lawn at the corner of Birch and North San Francisco Streets in Flagstaff. Follow Flagstaff’s conversation about raising the minimum wage on facebook.com/FlagstaffNeedsaRaise.

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