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April 13, 2015

I am the co-founder and Executive Director of a Forest Grove based non-profit called Adelante Mujeres. We provide education, empowerment and microenterprise services to the Spanish speaking community.

I have one question this evening: What is a laborer's due? What does a laborer deserve?

This is the question Sister Barbara Raymond and I asked ourselves as we prepared to launch Adelante Mujeres over a dozen years ago. The US was in the middle of a recession, but we were clear about one thing: We needed to put employee well-being at the center of our business strategy. We knew that our capacity to thrive as an organization would depend on our staff thriving as well. We decided then, in 2002, that we would launch as a new nonprofit if and only if we could provide fair wages, health benefits, paid vacation and paid sick leave to our employees. We would not work for positive social change on the backs of our employees. Nor would we make our employees turn to government programs to meet their financial needs.

I don't think we are different than most small employers. I think we all want to do what is just. Most all of us care about our employees. However, even though we care, it is easy to let other factors influence our decisions. The market will not solve the problem of low-wages. Good intentions will not solve the problem.

So what is a laborer's due? I think we can all agree that a laborer deserves a fair wage. Our current minimum wage is short changing thousands of Oregon families. A shameful number of full-time workers today are trying to survive on a minimum wage, a wage that doesn't come close to supporting them or their families.

Let's remember that the government programs that make up our safety net were never meant to subsidize businesses that don't pay a just wage. A full time worker should not need to turn to government programs to survive. Let's give workers the dignity they deserve.

Tonight I ask you to do what is right and do what is just – make sure that all laborers in our wonderful state receive their due. Support a minimum wage increase to \$15.