

## **Republican Perspective**

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### **The Python Hunters**

Want a job? The South Florida Water Management District is paying people to hunt and kill Burmese pythons.

Everglades National Park and its surroundings are overrun by the non-native snakes which have decimated some and even eliminated other native species. Rabbit and fox populations have disappeared. Raccoons, opossums, and bobcats are nearly gone.

At the top of the food chain, the pythons have no predators. They have upset the ecosystem, depriving the native predators---alligators and panthers---of their chow.

Over 1,000 people applied, of which 25 were selected to hunt the pythons. The hunters are given special access to python infested publicly owned land. While this work seems dangerous and even terrifying, it pays handsomely: \$8.10 per hour---which is Florida's minimum wage.

But there are bonuses. In addition to the extravagant minimum wage, successful hunters get \$50 for snakes up to four feet long. Longer snakes fetch an additional \$25 per foot. So a 10-foot python, for example, would bring \$350---provided the hunter survives to collect his check.

There is periodically an effort to increase the national minimum wage (now \$7.25). Raising the minimum wage was a rallying cry in the 2016 presidential campaign. Fast food workers even mounted a strike last year, demanding \$15 an hour. A \$15 national "living" wage was central to Bernie Sanders' candidacy.

California's minimum wage is now \$10 (\$10.50 if the employer has over 25 employees), and is scheduled to rise to \$15 in January 2022.

The argument that minimum wage is not a living wage is probably correct. But minimum wage jobs typically are filled by unskilled workers, by youngsters entering the workforce, or by students and others working part-time. Hopefully they will have moved on to better paying jobs before they buy a BMW and need a living wage.

The argument against an increase is that businesses employing low-skilled workers are typically operating with very low profit margins. Forcing them to pay higher wages will in turn make them raise their prices or hire fewer workers. Some will automate where

possible, as is happening in the fast food industry. Either way, unskilled workers lose out because of fewer jobs, higher prices, or both.

There is certainly a wide range of low-paying jobs. There are burgers to be flipped, hotel rooms to be cleaned, cars to be washed, and crops to be picked. But in the array of minimum wage jobs, we've probably found the toughest.

Regardless where you stand on the issue of raising the minimum wage, it sure seems easier to sympathize with the python hunters over the other typically low-wage workers.

Would you rather bus tables or hunt pythons in the Everglades? If I had to make the choice it would be easy. I would chose anything rather than be hunted by pythons. Especially pythons large enough to earn bonus points.