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## Raising the minimum wage is the right thing to do | Opinion

**Donato (Danny) Pietrodangelo** Your Turn

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Martha's job is taking care of elderly people – perhaps someone like your mom. That means bathing her with a sponge, since she's too frail to shower, helping her put on a fresh nightgown, changing the bedding and helping soften the embarrassment of not being able to make it to the bathroom.

Martha makes \$9.97 per hour providing intimate care to some of the frailest and frequently abandoned among us. That's \$80 a day, probably less than the person who cuts your hair.

Her company's CEO makes \$10,080 for the same eight hours. That's a ratio of 1:1,120. In the 1950s, the average ratio of CEO pay to median worker salary was 1:20.

Low wages go beyond pay, to things like self-worth. This morning, my breakfast server was on the verge of tears.

“What's wrong?” I asked.

“I don't believe in people anymore,” she said. “Just because I'm wearing this uniform they think they can treat me like dirt.”

She's raising a child on Florida's restaurant minimum wage: \$5.44 per hour. The law assumes tips will bring that up to a livable wage. The people next to me tipped \$2 on a \$20 tab.

Opposing a \$15 minimum wage plays to darker angels of free enterprise. Yes, I understand profitability is the point. But if making the most money is the sole index of business worth, that makes for a soulless commercial landscape where workers are tantamount to their markup value.

At about 14.7%, Florida has more people below the poverty level than 34 other states. With an unemployment rate 3.4%? Yes, because the state's primary industries – including leisure and

hospitality, education and health care – employ some of the lowest paid workers. This means that one in four Florida households live on less than \$25,000 per year – the working poor.

Trump is trumpeting “his” soaring economy. True for the few. Corporate profits are at a record high, management compensation is off the scale, and tax cuts gifted big business with a \$600-800 million windfall – 75% of which went to shareholders in a dividends and stock buyback surprise party.

At the same time, wages have stayed flat. One dollar buys no more than it did 40 years ago, adjusted for inflation.

Walmart is taking bows for raising its minimum wage from \$9 to \$11 per hour. That’s better than nothing – and nice optics – but two bucks an hour from a company with profits of \$26 billion?

There’s no hard consensus on the impact of raising the minimum wage. However, based on very healthy balance sheets, any big business job cuts, reduction in employee hours, price increases or store closings would be the result of greed, not payroll. Start with reduced dividends and management compensation

As for small businesses, fair pay contributes to happy workers, who contribute to the bottom line. Paying livable wages is also about doing the right thing. And if you can’t do the right thing and make a profit, you have some soul searching to do.

*Donato (Danny) Pietrodangelo owns Pietrodangelo Production Group and is a freelance writer. He recently won an award from the National Society of Newspaper Columnists for columns published in the Democrat.*