Here are some exciting new trends in living wage policy and organizing that must be communicated effectively to the media.

1. Expansion of Existing Laws

One of the most exciting—and underreported—trends in the movement is the growing number of cities expanding their living wage laws to cover more workers at higher wages.

Over the last couple of years, at least five cities—including those with some of the longest-standing living wage laws—have done so. For example, the Boston City Council voted to increase its living wage level from $9.11 to $10.25 an hour and to lower thresholds so more contractors were covered, including additional non-profits.

In Chicago, ACORN and SEIU pushed successfully to increase that city’s living wage from $7.60 to $9.05 and to add an annual inflation adjuster.

This past year, New York City threw over its 1996 law—which reportedly covered about 1,400 workers—in favor of an ambitious new policy that is estimated to cover as many as 50,000 workers.

Representing another expansion trend, voters in Oakland last year expanded their 1998 living wage law to the Port of Oakland where thousands of workers at the airport and seaport stand to gain.

The story of these bold expansions should be a key piece of our message to the media. These moves by veteran living wage cities are the best evidence yet that living wage laws are working. Given that there are more than 100 living wage laws on the books, these examples should also signal to the media the exciting potential of this national expansion trend. Our message slightly shifts to highlight the need to include more workers because passing living wage laws doesn’t spell doom for businesses and the economy and everyone benefits.

There is a growing number of cities that are expanding their living wage laws to cover more workers at higher wages.
2. Going Citywide

While the vast majority of living wage laws on the books have limited their coverage to public employees and/or firms who do business with public funds, there are increasing attempts to move beyond this model to explore laws that apply to the private sector more broadly.

Both Berkeley and Santa Monica, CA have enacted laws that combine “traditional” living wage coverage with expanded coverage of all firms in those cities' elite tourist zones (while Berkeley’s law has thus far survived legal challenge, Santa Monica's was eventually brought down with a fusillade of hotel industry money).

What's more, New Orleans voters and Santa Fe's City Council have enacted city-wide minimum wage laws that apply broadly to nearly the entire private sector (New Orleans was struck down by a business lawsuit and Santa Fe’s is being challenged). As this guide does to print, a community and labor coalition in San Francisco has begun to collect signatures to put an $8.50 city-wide minimum wage increase on the November 2003 ballot.

Though there are still only a handful of city-wide minimum wage efforts, it is quite appropriate to mention these more ambitious campaigns when talking to the media about our own campaigns. After all, expanding living wage in this way is a natural extension of our work. Emphasizing the potential of the movement to expand private sector coverage is even more strategically significant given that it is precisely this trend that most concerns the big business opposition (read: they're freaking out) and that their most aggressive tactics are designed to prevent. Our media message should contain our most ambitious vision: a living wage for all workers.

3. Living Wage for Caregivers

The first phase of the living wage movement largely ignored non-profit employees and caregivers such as day care, home health care, mental health service providers, etc. There are several reasons for this—including that many ordinances specifically exempted non-profits. Increasingly, campaigns are taking on the challenge of providing a living wage to these workers.

In Boston and Suffolk County, NY, day care and Head Start workers are included in new or expanded coverage. Home care workers stand to benefit from the living wage requirements in Suffolk, New York City and other cities.

The message for these campaigns must be slightly different due to the reliance of most of these agencies on scarce public funds. Living wage organizers must see these difficult fights as an opportunity to open up a larger discussion about fiscal priorities and the need to increase public funding for crucial social services such as child care and elder care. The message is not that it won't cost any money to insure these essential workers are paid a living wage. The message is there is arguably no more important use of public money than to redress the shamefully low wages paid to those who care for our society's most vulnerable citizens. These types of campaigns also lend themselves to messages around the quality of care and may feed nicely into current organizing campaigns that target these workers for unionization.

4. Defending What We’ve Won

OK, so not all trends are good. In response to our countless local victories, the business opposition has grown increasingly desperate, nasty, and (dare we say?) effective.

After years of unsuccessful attempts to thwart effective grassroots organizing at the local level, business groups are enlisting their conservative cronies in state legislatures all over the country in an attempt to enact state legislation that prohibits local wage laws. Such pre-emption laws have already passed in nine states—Arizona, Colorado, South Carolina, Louisiana, Missouri, Utah, Oregon, Florida and Texas—and have been (and are being) pursued in several others—Michigan, Kansas, Tennessee, Virginia, New Mexico, etc.

At the same time, the tough economic times have meant these same groups are finding more sympathetic ears in local city councils for their efforts to repeal ordinances that are already on the books. In at least four cases, opponents have filed lawsuits aimed at repealing living wage laws passed by both elected bodies and voters themselves. At least eight cities have lost their living wage laws due to legislative or legal repeal.

The message is that there is arguably no more important use of public money than to redress the shamefully low wages paid to those who care for our society’s most vulnerable citizens.

(cont.)
We must see these new attacks for what they are and call them that way to the media. Our message emphasizes the fact that states preventing municipalities from making their own decisions about the economic policies that are right for them is an attack on local control. Strong-arm lobbying tactics and lawsuits that result in living wage legislation being repealed before it has even gone into effect are an affront to the will of the people. Both of these strategies are a desperate, backdoor attempt by the hotel and restaurant industries to subvert any attempts to regulate their exploitation of the working poor.
What does living wage law have to do with youth and youth policy? Plenty, especially in the way of opportunities, threats and media strategies.

**Opportunities: Youth are Vulnerable Workers & Strong Advocates for Justice**

Since the 1980’s, and even more so in the three years since 9/11, the U.S. economy has produced the highest levels of economic inequality, insecurity, and overall poverty among the world’s 16 most “advanced” capitalist economies. Within that context, youth and young workers have been tremendously impacted and marginalized into a vulnerable and easily exploitable labor sector. Young workers make up more than 60 percent of the service sector. As a population of vulnerable workers, youth are impacted by any legislation that attempts to raise or protect the minimum wage.

The youth sector of the movement for economic and social justice is often one of the most vibrant and creative forces there is. Partnering with youth organizations is often a highly successful strategy for winning any campaign. All over the country, youth organizations, high school classes, college students, and youth religious organizations have initiated or joined fights to demand a living wage.

The self-interest is clear: our parents are workers and their salary puts food on the table and clothes on our backs; youth service providers are the ones who care for us, and when they are underpaid, we suffer; we too are underpaid workers with families and without benefits.

**Threats: Age/Race as a Wedge Issue**

Age has also been used repeatedly as a wedge issue in campaigns for economic and racial justice. For example, the building of youth jails in suburban white communities relies on stereotypes of violent youth. This builds a base of support for increased construction of youth jails while simultaneously dangling the carrot of new jobs over the mouths of hungry rural and suburban whites. Stereotypes about youth of color as dangerous are a powerful motive force and require strategic responses by communities fighting for justice.

Youth workers are often not covered by living wage ordinances. Under the City of Somerville, Massachusetts’ Living Wage Ordinance (Ordinance No. 1999-1), any person or entity who has entered into a contract with the City of Somerville is required to pay its employees who are involved in providing services to the City of Somerville no less than a “living wage.” The living wage currently is $8.35 per hour. The only employees not covered by the Living Wage Ordinance are individuals in a Youth Program.

“Youth Program” as defined in the ordinance, “means any city, state or federally-funded program which employs youth, as defined by city, state or federal guidelines, during the summer, or as part of a school-to-work program, or in any other related seasonal or part-time program.” There are additionally training wages, which are
wages paid below the minimum wage that enable employers to fill seasonal and summer jobs with youth workers paid less than the minimum wage, displacing many adult workers. The result is that, like workfare workers, age is used as a method of filling city jobs with workers paid less than minimum wage. Whether it’s a living wage campaign or a broader economic justice fight, young people can contribute and are impacted.

Additionally, the foundation of living wage ordinances is that public monies should be used for the public good, and that all private businesses that do not comply with living wage standards as defined by the local policy should not be subsidized by city funds. This is often attacked with dirty tricks such as the idea that use of public funds in this way would “hurt” youth by eliminating jobs for youth service providers if their employers do not abide by living wage standards.

As vulnerable workers, impacted family members, scapegoats, and wedge weapons, youth are an important feature of the political landscape of any fight for living wage. Therefore, the media work conducted to support that fight must treat youth and young workers as the political actors and strong advocates for justice they are.

Media Strategies for Success

In the media advocacy component of any living wage campaign, it is important to examine all of the political factors as both potential threats and opportunities. Youth are both of these to a living wage campaign. Below are some media strategies to support the successful building of living wage campaigns that ultimately provide economic justice for all, including youth and young workers.

**Goal setting:** You may be trying to win a new living wage ordinance for your city, fighting to protect a pre-existing living wage ordinance, or trying to extend the benefits of a pre-existing ordinance to a broader community. The following strategies should be used based on your political goals at the moment.

**Reframing living wage:** One of the economic concepts that typifies opposition to living wage ordinances is that workers are paid low wages because they are unskilled. Many workers that benefit from living wage ordinances, especially

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**SOME FACTS ABOUT YOUNG WORKERS:**

*Provided by the Young Workers Project of San Francisco*

- The unemployment rate for youth ages 20-25 years old, both nationally and in San Francisco, is almost twice the rate for people over 25 years old.[i]
- In San Francisco County, unemployment for African-American youth is almost 3 times as high as for white youth (35.7% vs. 13.7%) and the rate is close to double for Latino youth as for white youth (17.9% vs. 13.7%).[ii]
- Young workers are more likely to be laid off than older workers.[iii]
- In September and October of 2001, workers ages 16-24 suffered 95% of all job losses. Young people in this age group are six times as likely as older workers to be unemployed.[ii]
- Young workers are more likely to be hired as temp workers; 53% of all temp workers are under the age of 35. Temporary jobs on average pay lower wages, while youth temp workers are more likely to suffer periods of unemployment and be poor than are permanent workers.[iii]
- Community Colleges are among the hardest hit, with a proposed increase in student fees from $11 to $24 per unit. This is a 120% fee increase, the largest percentage fee increase ever in the history of California.[iv]
- Community college students are more likely to be employed and work for more hours per week than four-year college students. In 1994, 90% of community college students reported working while being enrolled in college over the last five years.[iv]
- 40% of working community college students reported that work limited their class choice at college, and 37% reported that work had a negative effect on their academic performance.[v]

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[v] National Center for Educational Statistics 1996

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(Cont.)
young workers, provide basic services to the city. The Youth Media Council suggests that rather than focusing on the skills or lack thereof of workers, media coverage should focus on the service these workers provide to a city they cannot afford to live in. Using this framework, living wage can be more easily connected to fights to increase the minimum wage and other youth-led economic justice fights.

- **Hooking youth issues to living wage campaigns in the news.** Mother’s and Father’s Day are good times to talk about the impact living wage policy can have on children and families. This is a good moment to reframe “family values” and claim the moral high-ground on this issue.

  The last day of school is a good opportunity to do press work about summer jobs, and the first day of school is a good time to inject goals that impact part-time employment for youth. When new budgets are passed, particularly when they defund youth jobs, an opportunity is created to talk about the impact this has on young people.

**Media Messages and Messengers**

Following are some suggestions for carrying forward a youth-based message as part of your economic justice campaign.

- **Highlighting Injustice:** Demonstrate inequality and focus on exploitation. For example: Youth should not be treated as second-class workers. The proposal to create a “training wage” for youth workers discriminates against minors. Most jobs filled by youth do not require a 60-day training period. Youth deserve to be treated with the same dignity and respect as all workers.

- **Institutional Accountability:** When we use media advocacy to reframe political issues, we are generally seeking to shift public opinion from blaming the victims to holding the institutions and decision-makers in power responsible for the policies and conditions they create. Focusing attention on employers of young workers can serve to highlight gross wage inequalities.

- **Counter-messaging wedge attacks:** Engaging youth as players in the fight for a living wage provides a new way to “focus on the family,” and highlight racial injustice as youth of color and their parents make up a large percentage of those employed in city-funded, part time or temporary jobs.

- **Spokespeople:** Youth can inspire empathy as spokespeople. They help foster a sense that the goals of these campaigns are morally right, and the belief that by investing in living wage policy, cities are investing in their future.

Youth can inspire empathy as spokespeople.
**HEARING FROM YOUTH ON THE FRONT LINES**

The following interview is with Nato Green, an advocate with the Young Worker’s Project (YWP). YWP is a San Francisco Bay Area-based organization advocating for the rights of young workers. The interview was conducted by Malkia Cyril of the Youth Media Project.

*Malkia Cyril*: Are living wage campaigns important to youth and young workers? If so, why?

*Nato Green*: Yes, but it depends. Any campaign to boost wages for low-wage workers benefits youth. However, most living wage campaigns thus far haven’t been major youth issues for two reasons. First, by targeting mostly businesses with contracts with city governments, living wage ordinances don’t affect jobs that young workers tend to get. There are some youth in every sector, but here in San Francisco, the main benefit to young workers I would guess is not through city contractors but San Francisco Airport retail jobs. There were probably a handful of young workers who benefited from the S.F. living wage at nonprofits, security guards, construction, etc. A second reason is that many living wage ordinances have exemptions for minors, students, or trainees. So again in San Francisco, many of the City contractors or City jobs will have substandard “youth” intern or trainee jobs that may much lower wages.

I think area living wage laws and minimum wage laws will benefit youth a lot more. For example, youth working retail at Jack London Square in Oakland, a big tourist and entertainment area, benefited from the Port of Oakland living wage. Business groups apparently fought the effort by using youth to argue that youth don’t need higher wages. Similarly, campus living wage laws can benefit youth in work-study, cafeteria, clerical, and other jobs.

Too often organizers of those campaigns agree to exemptions for students.

But the minimum wage is absolutely a young worker issue. Young workers are concentrated in low-wage industries—temp jobs, fast food, food and drinking establishments, department stores, video stores, movie theaters, grocery, etc., where the minimum wage level has a very direct effect on the workers. These industries are defined by their youth workforce. Fast-food for example pays minimum wage to a greater percentage of workers than any other sector.

**MC**: What percentage of the economy are young workers and what conditions do they face?

*NG*: We’ve seen some data from Bureau of Labor Statistics that workers under age 25 make up half of those earning at or below minimum wage. Remember, some of those folks are young recent immigrants.

**MC**: If a group was doing media work for a living wage campaign, what information about youth and young workers should they have?

*NG*: Well, in terms of organizing goals, pass a living/minimum wage without exemptions for youth, students, or trainees. Use interest in wages in general to spotlight young people in this country. Increase enforcement of wage and hour laws (i.e., overtime and meal periods) among youth. Get youth to expect more from their jobs.

Increase youth participation in the political process in an issue that directly affects them more than most.

**MC**: What’s the bottom line for young people and decent paying jobs?

*NG*: In terms of what’s at stake, it’s education for youth. Raising wages for youth expands their educational opportunities. Tuition is rising much faster than wages, so students are forced to go further into debt, take longer to get through school, and work more while at school thereby compromising their education. For those youth who are doing what they’re supposed to be doing—getting a job and going to school—they still can’t get ahead with the jobs they can get. Things are getting worse economically for our generation. With the decline in good union jobs, higher education is the only way to get ahead but the most rapidly growing job categories are entry-level service jobs. Our communities need more access to higher paying jobs. Those who think that if they work hard and get good grades they’ll get ahead are wrong.
Now That the Law Has Been Passed:
ACTIVISTS TURN ATTENTION TO ENFORCING LIVING WAGE

By Swaroopa Iyengar, Development and Communications Director, East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Community (EBASE)

Our story is one many working on living wage can share: how to enforce a living wage law once it has been passed, in particular by employers reluctant to live by the letter of the law? That is the challenge facing us here in Oakland, California, as our focus has shifted from securing living wages to ensuring they are paid. The media has played a critical role in the next phase of our campaign. It has been a test of perseverance and tenacity.

Background

The Port of Oakland is often described as the “economic engine” of the East Bay. The Port, covering 19 miles of waterfront along the entire city of Oakland, includes more than 1,000 acres of commercial real estate. It creates 22,000 jobs in the region and this number is projected to grow to excess of 35,000 by 2010.

Securing better jobs for low-wage Port workers has been a protracted struggle for us, and will continue to be. After negotiating with and challenging the Port to enact a living wage on Port-assisted businesses throughout 2001, we shifted our strategy to target the Mayor and City Council of Oakland and demand they place the issue on the ballot. Our campaign successfully made the need for living wage jobs a defining issue of the election in the media and for voters. Under tremendous pressure from our coalition and opposing businesses and at the last minute, City Council leaders introduced a proposal and put it on the ballot. EBASE launched a coordinated effort to pass “Measure I,” which resulted in a victory when it triumphed by more than 78 percent support, the largest margin of any issue on the local ballot. By approving Measure I in March of 2002, the people of Oakland took a major step in making sure that Port businesses—beneficiaries of one our region’s key public resources—support working families.

Enforcement: Getting Employers to Pay By the Rules

Then the real trouble began. Measure I went into effect in April 2002. Since then, the Port has continually resisted responsibility for implementing the law. Firms are trying to escape the law by finding “loopholes” and playing fast and furious with the measure’s language, including misrepresenting their firm size and other “tricks.” We have to constantly monitor the Port and pressure them to take action for fear of legal challenges.

Our aim is to ensure our living wage law is comprehensively implemented by clearly defining some of the ambiguous language in the law. We also want to maximize the law’s potential and include the highest number of businesses possible.

1. Get the Port to adopt a set of rules and regulations: EBASE and its legal team have developed a comprehensive set of rules and regulations around Measure I in this past year. This document will effectively
close all the loopholes in the law and ensure that every business at the Port is required to pay a living wage.

2. Pressure non-complying businesses to start paying a living wage: In order to resist paying a living wage, rental car companies, a major Port business concern especially at our waterfront Oakland Airport, made questionable arguments around contracts, billing, and who was included. They said month-to-month contracts were not covered by the measure until they expired. This sneaky “contract” gambit would effectively exclude half of the covered workers from the law. EBASE responded by organizing rental car workers, scheduling meetings with the Mayor and City Council members and mobilizing more than 300 Port workers and activists for Port meetings. We will continue to monitor businesses and hold them accountable to the workers.

3. Highlight living wage success stories: We are bringing worker voices to the forefront and having them share their experiences of how they and their families have benefited from receiving a living wage. Insofar as it has been implemented, the living wage has had no discernible negative impact on airport revenues and passenger travel — on the contrary, both Port workers and Port businesses have gained together from the living wage.

Our Campaign Goals

Using the positive media support we already received for Measure I, we are now moving into the second stage of our campaign and are using media as a multi-faceted tool. Our goals are:

- **Leverage Oakland politicians:** our living wage law won by more than any other initiative on the ballot, clearly illustrating Oakland voters’ priorities. As a result, Oakland politicians have publicly associated themselves with the living wage. For example, Measure I was highlighted in Mayor Jerry Brown’s campaign materials last March. In order to effectively pressure the Port, we will leverage City leaders’ associations with this law through extensive media coverage around implementation issues.

- **Generate voter response:** Voter outreach in the Measure I campaign reached more than 6,000 voters on the street with postcards and 10,000 voters by phone. In addition, tens of thousands supported living wages at the Port by voting yes last March. EBASE and our coalition will tap into this mass resource to generate pressure (including letters to the editor, letters to politicians, and phone calls) to the Port Commissioners and Oakland politicians to enforce the law.

- **Change the Port’s Culture Around Economic Justice Issues:** The business-dominated Port seemed, at one time, impervious to vital community issues. We have now seen that with the right strategy and an aggressive media campaign we can win with a unanimous vote by the Board. We will use media to pressure the Board to enforce Measure I.

**Media Strategy**

This campaign has high local, regional and national visibility and will set the tone for other policies covering institutions like the Port. Measure I received substantial positive and widespread media during the campaign and over the last months. In the second stage of our campaign, we have developed a multi-layered media plan that will put further pressure on the Port to fully implement the law.

Elements of our media strategy include:

- **Release of a “one-year later” Measure I status report:** EBASE is going to release to the media a comprehensive report evaluating the implementation of the law. This 15-page report contains recommendations for the Port around the current inadequate monitoring and enforcement issues.

- **Raising worker voices:** Our Port report compares and contrasts testimonies from workers who have benefited by earning a living wage with those who have not. Through these profiles we will draw media attention to the benefits workers and their families have gained by receiving a living wage.

- **Specific media messaging:** Measure I drew support from thousands of Oakland voters, many of who worked on the campaign. Voters were committed to the issue and felt they were exerting a direct positive influence on workers at the Port. This year our consistent media message to voters is going to emphasize their participation in the campaign last year, and draw attention to the changes their vote has made in the lives of workers who are now getting a living wage. Voters overwhelmingly passed the law, don’t they deserve to see it implemented? We also will enhance the message to bring in the frame of how the law is working—or not, if employers don’t play by the rules and if is not enforced.

- **Wide media outreach:** We will reach out to a wide range of media outlets. We are targeting television, radio and print outlets in the area like *The Oakland Tribune, The Montclairian, The Berkeley Daily Planet*, Channel 2, KQED and KPFA. Some of these organizations covered the Measure I campaign extensively last year. Now we are pitching the story with our one-year-later hook and what is working and not working. We are also going to approach ethnic media outlets in the area with a large immigrant worker audience.

By 2004, we anticipate effective systems for enforcement will be in place, thanks in part to the work of EBASE, our coalition, the voices of workers and the mandate of the voters. By our continuous monitoring of the Port, and ongoing media engagement, we will ensure that the next chapter of this story is about how workers got the wages the people of Oakland want them to have.
Living Wage Reloaded:
IN A TIME OF ECONOMIC DOWNTURN, “COMMUNITY BENEFITS” A NEXT FRONTIER

By Sarah Zimmerman, Assistant Research Director, Working Partnerships USA

In November 1998 the San Jose City Council approved what was then the country’s highest living wage ordinance—$9.50 an hour with benefits, and $10.75 an hour without. It was a time of economic prosperity as Silicon Valley rode the wave of the dot-com boom. But now times have changed. Our story is about how we framed our first battle to pass the living wage law, then transformed our campaign to accommodate changing economic times.

The Campaign Back-Story

The South Bay Labor Council together with Working Partnerships and numerous community and faith organizations led the original campaign. The tone of the 1998 campaign focused on the paradox of working families’ struggle to get by while surrounded by the incredible wealth and productivity of Silicon Valley. The message highlighted the large numbers of working poor despite the phenomenal economic growth and wealth amassed, depicted in the image of the “hourglass economy.”

In a San Jose Mercury News story three months before the vote, Amy Dean, Working Partnerships executive director and Labor Council executive officer, transmitted this message, saying, “These are times where we have to ask ourselves, ‘If the economy looks bright, why are so many people doing so poorly?’”

The idea was largely unpopular in the business community, with the charge against it led by the Chamber of Commerce together with the Mercury News. The Chamber painted it as a job killer, and many local politicians supported it cautiously, sensing at the beginning of the campaign that failure to approve a living wage would tarnish their political image only slightly more than passing it.

The communications strategy for the campaign focused on convincing the public of the need for a living wage. It aimed to fend off the opposition’s claims that failure to approve a living wage would tarnish their political image only slightly more than passing it.

The communications strategy for the campaign focused on convincing the public of the need for a living wage. It aimed to fend off the opposition’s claims that the policy would damage the economic boom of Silicon Valley.

Our side addressed both of those messages in the research tool we employed. Working Partnerships and the Labor Council developed a report used to establish two facts.

First, the cost of living in Silicon Valley is extraordinary, and many working families are not getting by. The report communicated this by publishing the “self-sufficiency wage,” a tool that illustrated how much families need to earn to survive—anywhere from $12.42 an hour for a single adult and child to $21.60 an hour for a four-person family.

Connecting the cost of living to a dollar wage exposed the inadequacy of minimum wages and provided a numerical base for the discussion of a different standard. This strategy paid off. As Dean said, “We knew we were winning when the discussion shifted to how high the wage should be, rather than whether there should be a living wage at all.”

The second fact we established in the report was how much a living wage might cost businesses. We needed this data to demonstrate a minimal impact. To further reduce the potential negative spin from those numbers, the report examined the...
increase in terms of the percent increase in payroll, rather than as a dollar figure. The report projected most increases to be less than 15 percent, with an eight percent average overall.

The campaign also used a moral argument resting on responsibility the City had to pay its workers a decent wage. This rested on the fact the living wage applies to businesses with some financial tie to the city. This ethical position was emphasized in both the report and editorials placed by the Labor Council.

**Defining the Arguments and Making a Case**

The ordinance in San Jose applies mainly to city service contractors and companies that receive grants from the City. Underlying the ordinance is the notion that the City should pay its workers a living wage, and that workers on contracts for delivering city services or workers at businesses receiving hefty sums of money from the City are virtually city employees.

The quality of work that a higher wage attracts was also used during the campaign to gather support. This argument has become quite common in living wage ordinances at airports and has been cited as one reason that a living wage results in greater airport security—since workers do not have to work two full time jobs their performance improves.

A final theme of the report revealed how the ordinance helped taxpayers. This benefit is framed in terms of the cost-savings that increasing wages and health insurance for low-wage workers would bring by reducing reliance on public programs such as food stamps and Medi-Cal related costs.

**The Opposition Strikes Back**

The media opposition was fierce. The Chamber accused the Council of trying to impose a super minimum wage on all low-wage workers in San Jose, despite projections of impacting only 1,500 of the 100,000 county workers. An August 1988 *Mercury News* article by Barry Witt stated, “Business groups believe the city should not step deeper into the relationship between employers and workers.” That argument would become a key message of the opposition.

To neutralize the business community’s opposition, one editorial published in the *Mercury News* in favor of the ordinance took on the idea of the unfettered free market. Our September 6 editorial by Barry del Buono and Bill Murphy noted that the city government helps businesses in numerous ways and should do no less for low-wage workers.

“Opponents of this measure claim that local government should not make rules like the living wage,” said Bruno and Murphy. “But San Jose helps businesses through Business Cluster Incubators, an Enterprise Zone, Development Enhancement Funds, Industrial Development Bonds, Neighborhood Business Districts, and a Redevelopment Agency. All of these programs make rules that enable firms to do better than the free market would allow. San Jose offers a helping hand to everyone from young entrepreneurs to established CEOs. Low-wage workers who provide city services should be given the same opportunity.”

Ultimately our arguments and our frame took hold. The City Council passed the measure. It was time to end the chapter of that part of our struggle.

**From Living Wage to Community Benefits**

No sooner did one chapter end than another began. As we strategized on how to carry forward our gains and build on our base, the economic bottom fell out of our economy when the dot-com bubble burst.

We realized this is not a time to consider expanding the ordinance because so many workers and businesses are tightening their belts. We knew that such a move could be criticized—any expansion would come at the expense of other city workers. Instead, we realized the time had come to reframe the issue and evolve our strategy.

**Enter the Community Benefits Initiative.**

Our aim is to advocate how best to invest the limited resources the public sector has to attract businesses, and to ensure those businesses benefit our community instead of making matters worse for working families. We want to ensure that businesses receiving economic subsidies and tax breaks from the city don’t create poverty-level jobs. We want to end market-level housing projects that fail to contribute to the huge need for affordable housing. We want to avoid placing greater burdens on the public sector that businesses now generate when “bottom-feeding” retail tenants offer poverty-level jobs that increase the public benefits families need to survive.

The Community Benefits Initiative (CBI) introduced here will reform how economic (cont.)
development works in San Jose and in California.

The CBI is broken up into two stages in order to give more people the chance to participate in tinkering with the tools being developed and applied to the economic development process.

The first stage involves a reporting mechanism that uses information provided by the developer and public agencies that examine the effects of projects before the city awards a subsidy. The second stage will bring community members into revisions of the project based on community needs and benefits.

The decision to break the process into two stages was a “marketing” decision as well as a practical one. Because the process seeks to improve community input, we wanted to involve as many people as possible over a significant amount of time. With this timeline, community leaders can examine the information requested and then determine the way revisions should be made. They will have a year or more to approve the reporting tool and discuss what the process for changing projects should look like. As a marketing tool this helps offset labor’s “image” of making back-room deals without the support of the broader public.

**Framing Community Benefits and a Focus on Labor**

The campaign being waged to pass the first stage of our CBI effort again starts from the point of view that the City has a moral role in this process. As the actor granting the public subsidy, the City Council has the responsibility of assuring the money pays for neutral or positive benefits.

To offset the opposition, however, the campaign emphasizes that the policy only applies to businesses receiving subsidies from local government of at least $2—$5 million. This initial “spin” is needed to blunt concerns that the city will start applying the CBI guidelines to any little project before it, such as small-scale façade improvements.

The policy also provides labor with a way to deliver benefits to a large group of people. Our campaign made a conscious choice to develop a policy that would deliver returns for a wide range of community groups. The policy especially targets groups outside of labor unions by moving beyond labor’s traditional role of advocating for worker rights. Labor is clearly in support of community issues in this policy, from environmental quality to subsidized child-care to affordable housing.

In addition to repackaging labor’s image, this policy works as a terrific organizing tool. Labor can stand in solidarity with a broad range of community groups potentially affected by development projects, such as environmentalists, affordable-housing advocates, small businesses, minority-owned businesses, child care advocates and anti-poverty advocates such as ACORN.

One message of this campaign has been repacked and now plays a much more central role, given the dive the economy has taken. The message itself frames much of the objectives of the policy: Increasing return on investment. That is, are subsidies and tax breaks—“investments” of taxpayer money by the city—being used wisely?

**The tool needed to examine the investment is the Community Impact Report (CIR). The CIR brings people together to make information public and gives the community and the City Council the chance to evaluate their investment together.**

Another frame involves seeing the work as “sharing prosperity.” Prosperity is shared by including people in economic development. Themes of inclusion and shared prosperity dominate our media materials and other written materials. This framing also puts opponents on the defensive. Who wants to be the enemy of shared prosperity? Who wants to stand for exclusion?

**The Opposition Fights Back in the Media**

Media opposition to our strategy has sidestepped the factual details of our CBI proposal. Rather, opponents continue to bash labor and dredge up stereotypical negative images of the labor movement. Labor is accused of operating business as usual, with back-door deals and devising strategies that are not inclusive of the community. This message is dangerous because people are prone to believe it despite evidence that labor has led a three-year movement to open up the process!

In December 2002, labor was accused in the Mercury News of “holding the developer hostage to social needs.” Recently, the head of the Chamber of Commerce wrote an editorial published by

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*(cont.)*
the *Mercury News* accusing labor of backroom deals and keeping stakeholders out of the process. Of course, ignored was the fact that the Chamber and the Downtown Association of Businesses are the two "stakeholders." They, with the Redevelopment Agency, exclusively have seats at the table.

The editorial failed to mention the process that the Labor Council and Working Partnerships have derived to increase community participation. We developed two distinct approaches: first, our Community Impact Report aims to publicize information and enable a broad range of stakeholders to understand and analyze the potential effects of the process. Additionally, our advisory board for the entire campaign has engaged environmentalists, ACORN, small businesses, the Hispanic and Black Chambers of Commerce, affordable housing advocates, labor representatives, child care advocates, and academics.

**More Benefits Make this a Winner**

Following the development agreement that the Labor Council struck with City Council members, community activists and the developers, the *Mercury News* editorialized again about labor’s political agreements. It juxtaposed that seemingly piecemeal approach with a policy developed with broad input to determine how economic development should be conducted.

"The question of getting more community benefits out of redevelopment, which labor has raised, needs to be answered—not with piecemeal confrontations at city council meetings but with a city-wide policy that’s clear to all potential developers, and that has been established after broad public discussions." (*Mercury News* editorial, December 13, 2002)

The Labor Council has used the *Mercury News* quote itself to frame the current approach to widening the process and including a broad base of participants to craft a policy.

The message to garner support for such a policy is simple: more benefits for more groups in the community. Everybody benefits. It would provide greater predictability around development projects because of the information required to get approval, with a number of beneficial outcomes. It would improve the investment climate for developers by resolving difficulties of identifying and interacting with a broad range of interest groups in an organized and timely manner. It would enable City staff and taxpayers to quantify and evaluate the return on public investment. Finally, a policy with an analytical phase to examine effects of development would enable interested parties to understand and evaluate the potential impact of a project before the final agreement is drawn up. And it would result in better wages for workers.

As you can see, it’s not living wage business-as-usual here in San Jose. But we are taking the gains of our previous living wage campaign and are transforming them—with a new spin—into new strategies with promising outcomes for low-income workers. ■
Rising In the Deep South:
THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT LOSING A LIVING WAGE FIGHT, OR TWO
By Bob Becker, Knoxville Organizer, Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network

The Knoxville Living Wage Campaign may hold the national record for most living wage defeats. It's a dubious distinction, but one that has given us fortitude in knowing our losses now will only help strengthen us for future fights.

In 1999 and in 2002 the Knoxville City Council voted down living wage proposals. Yet, despite this, the living wage effort in Knoxville has succeeded in significantly raising wages for city workers and for workers in several other businesses. Perhaps most importantly, the effort has led to the living wage not only being part of the political landscape, but the concept has entered the vernacular here.

“I still tell people that the highlight of seven years work on the living wage was hearing a caller on sports radio complain about the raise the UT (University of Tennessee) head football coach got by saying, ‘it’s a shame for him to get all that money when most of the hourly workers at UT don’t even make a living wage,’” explains Bob Becker, lead organizer for the living wage in Knoxville. “UT football is big here in Knoxville. And sports radio during football season is huge. To hear the living wage phrase tossed in like that really said we had accomplished our goal here.”

Knoxville, Seat of the Old Guard
Knoxville is a conservative town. It’s old Republican conservative. Knoxville has been a Republican stronghold for as long as there has been a Republican party. So it lacks some of the conservative radicalism of the new right. Knoxville is a place where conservatism means doing very little and maintaining the status quo, and what little is done is mostly done for those who do quite well for themselves already.

The city structure of Knoxville reinforces this tendency. The lack of term limits has led to a mayor who has been in office for 16 years, and a majority of City Council that has been in office even longer. (Term limits have started kicking in recently). Plus, all City Council candidates run city-wide, so the nature of the election diminishes alternative voices.

The progressive side is pretty weak in Knoxville. Labor and the organized African-American community are both very small. The environmental community likewise is tiny. And because it has been a Republican stronghold for so long, the Democratic party itself tends to be marginalized and potential progressive leaders get co-opted into the conservative mainstream.

How We Got Started: A Bigger Vision of Economic Justice
The Knoxville Living Wage Campaign itself grew out of a “listening project” in Knoxville designed to find a way to build progressive influence in the community. The living wage was part of a larger, statewide economic justice coalition, the Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network. So the campaign has always been guided by a larger vision of economic justice.

Almost from the beginning the living wage effort has focused on larger goals than winning a vote at city council. “Our first goal was to get people to say ‘living wage,’” explains Sylvia Woods of the Central Labor Council, a strong supporter of the living wage. “We figured we could change things if we got people aware of the concept.”

The effort also focused on setting a relatively high standard for the living wage. “We
had quite a fight over where to set the level. Some groups were pushing for $15 an hour. We settled on $9.50, if benefits are included, as a way to aim high and to give ourselves a chance to win,” explains Becker.

If at First You Don’t Succeed…

The Knoxville Campaign developed a traditional ordinance and got it voted on in the spring of 1999. “We had the wage level. We covered corporate welfare, contracts and city worker. We even had in some local contracting language,” explains Becker. The ordinance was defeated on a 7-to-2 vote.

After a couple more years of work and a City election that brought some new people onto City Council, the campaign tried again in 2002.

“This time we took out the contracts and corporate welfare and the local contracts. We focused everything on city workers. We kept the $9.50 wage level. That was the key,” says Becker. The proposal was defeated 7-to-2.

Despite the two defeats most people involved look on the Knoxville Campaign as a successful effort. “We have really got people talking about the living wage,” states Labor’s Sylvia Woods. “People use the phrase a lot. And it has become an election issue.”

Almost from the beginning the living wage effort has focused on larger goals than winning a vote at city council.

Measuring Success by Different Standards

“We count it as a success every time we get living wage mentioned on TV or in a newspaper headline,” Woods explains. “We even have a collage made up of all the newspaper coverage we got in 1999. With the church work and the media coverage everyone has heard about the living wage and lots of people seem to understand it.”

In addition, the campaign has been winning wage increases for workers. “At the city level when we started the lowest-paid city worker earned $14,500 a year, and got a cost-of-living increase once a year,” Becker explains. “Now the lowest starting wage is $17,500. And the lowest-paid workers get two raises a year. It used to take 10 years for a city worker to earn a living wage. Now the mayor brags that every city worker gets up to $19,000 a year within two years.”

Other businesses in the city have also picked up on the living wage. A couple of unionized firms have put the living wage into their contract, including the city bus drivers. Plus, a major hospital and several social service agencies are moving to pay a living wage.

Perhaps the best success has been within the church community. “In 1999 we started reaching out to the faith community for support,” explains Becker. “We started with a ‘Living Wage in the Pulpit’ effort to get churches to do something around the living wage on a Sunday near Labor Day. We provide bulletin inserts, worship materials and discussion leaders. Each year we see 20 to 35 churches doing something. We also do a yearly Labor-Religion Forum to discuss ideas like the living wage,” continues Becker. “And in 2002 we had a letter signed by 67 church leaders supporting the living wage proposal. Best of all though has been how many churches looked at their own work-force and started paying a living wage to their janitors, church secretaries or child care workers.

In Knoxville the living wage message has not changed much over time. Perhaps we need to revisit the message next time around. But the campaign keeps its focus still on making the living wage a concept that everyone can understand and on keeping the living wage idea as prevalent as possible.

Despite the two defeats most people involved look on the Knoxville Campaign as a successful effort. “We have really got people talking about the living wage.”
By working in tandem with organizers, researchers, lawyers, workers and PR people you can take the story of living wage to the public and score success for your campaign. When the history of this economic justice movement is written know that you will be a part of it because you took your case to the public record through the media and your voice was heard.

One central point of this kit is our belief that careful planning, goal setting and coordination are critically important to your living wage media efforts. Your media work can bring together all the components of your struggle to make your community a better place to live and work. By proactively working with the media you can give voice to those most affected.

If there is one thing this kit has emphasized it’s that media should not be an afterthought. It should be a cornerstone of your campaign. What is at stake in our work is not simply higher wages or better working conditions. It’s not just speaking the perfect sound bite or scoring a fabulous headline. It’s about the very values and principles we hold dear in a democratic society. A society in which the basic worth and dignity of every human being are upheld and cherished. That is why we are spinning for our lives.

—Robert Bray