

Setting wages should come down to more than economics



EDITORIAL

When the nation adopted a minimum wage during the Great Depression, we came to a consensus that setting wages shouldn't be left entirely to the market, to the unfeeling forces of supply and demand. As a society, through our elected officials, we decided to place a limit on the market so that the value of our work wouldn't evaporate in a desperate struggle for economic survival.

By setting the minimum wage, even during the direst economic circumstances our nation has ever faced, we helped set the stage for the growth of the middle class. As our economy grew and wages increased in the succeeding

decades, American families were able to afford bigger and safer homes, cars, better health care, more education for their children. We've seen the benefits of those changes over the last 70 years as our nation has become an economic power like few the world has ever known.

Later this month, the federal minimum wage will increase 70 cents to \$6.55 an hour. In July of 2009, it will increase another 70 cents to \$7.25. Those increases are certainly welcomed by those trying to live on a minimum-wage job. But is that enough to fulfill our obligation to the working poor, to offer to them the same opportunity to pull themselves out of poverty and up the economic ladder that earlier generations of Americans have enjoyed?

Study after study has documented that the minimum

wage will still leave a family in poverty, unable to afford the basic necessities of life without assistance from the government or private charities. The amount of pay a person must receive to accomplish that is called a living wage.

The federal government estimates a person must earn \$10.19 an hour for a 40-hour work week to meet the basic necessities of life for a family of four without government assistance. That would cover costs such as housing, child care, food, transportation, health care and taxes.

This is more than an economic issue. It affects the quality of life for families across the county. It affects our communities at large. It goes to the value we place on every individual and the value we place on work.

Millions of American children live in poverty, and in

the majority of those families at least one adult is working a full-time job. Still others are forced to work two jobs and still can't crawl out of their financial hole. It can be a trap that ensnares a family for generations.

The struggle to meet their family's needs steals from parents time they could be spending with their children, nurturing them, loving them, teaching them. Time children need to grow up to be productive, responsible adults. Time that wealthier families enjoy and treasure.

We're not talking about handouts, we're talking about a just wage.

The "Catechism of the Catholic Church" says: "A just wage is the legitimate fruit of work. To refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice." It also says that a person's pay "should guaran-

tee man the opportunity to provide a dignified livelihood for himself and his family on the material, social, cultural, and spiritual level, taking into account the role and the productivity of each, the state of the business, and the common good."

It would be unrealistic to expect all businesses, many in very competitive industries, to immediately begin paying a living wage rather than simply the minimum wage. But as a society we could come to a consensus that a living wage should be our goal over time and then begin progressing toward that end. The benefits would reach far beyond those families immediately affected; they would reach to every part of our society.

We can't see this solely in terms of economics because it is more than an economic issue. It's a moral issue. ☩

Golf is a maddening, spiritual game that's full of life



REEL LIFE JOURNEYS

CHRISTOPHER FENOGLIO

The dew was still thick on the lush, green bent grass, testifying to the early morning tee times. At the first tee, four golfers stretched their muscles as they swung perfect practice swings.

Others waited patiently by their carts, readjusting the Velcro on their gloves and wiping their clubs clean. A light rain fell softly as the golfers prepared for a most important round of 18 holes.

No, it wasn't the Masters at Augusta; it wasn't even a city tournament at McCabe. It was the Fenoglio Family Golf Outing held during our Fourth of July reunion. There's a fondness for golf that runs through my family.

Some family members have monthly, even weekly love affairs with the sport. They'll meet regularly at their neighborhood course or fly to distant cities for nearly five hours of passionate play. Afterwards, no matter the outcome, they'll always look forward to their next rendezvous.

On the other hand, golf and I are sporadic daters, getting together only a couple times a year. We'll see each other for nine holes one afternoon, share a few laughs, part amicably without regret, and then forget about each other for many months.

So, when I read the reunion schedule included a golf outing, I accepted with a little

trepidation.

Will it be fun? Will my uncles give me helpful tips, even though I play left handed? Will I just completely embarrass myself?

Suffice it to say, the highlight of the round was the final hole. Not because the round was over, but because it was the only hole that I shot par. As the final putt dropped into the hole, I ignored the game's etiquette and shouted "Par!"

Up on the hill, already finished with his round, Uncle Mike shouted in praise and raised his arms in salute. "You still hit from the wrong side of the ball!" he added.

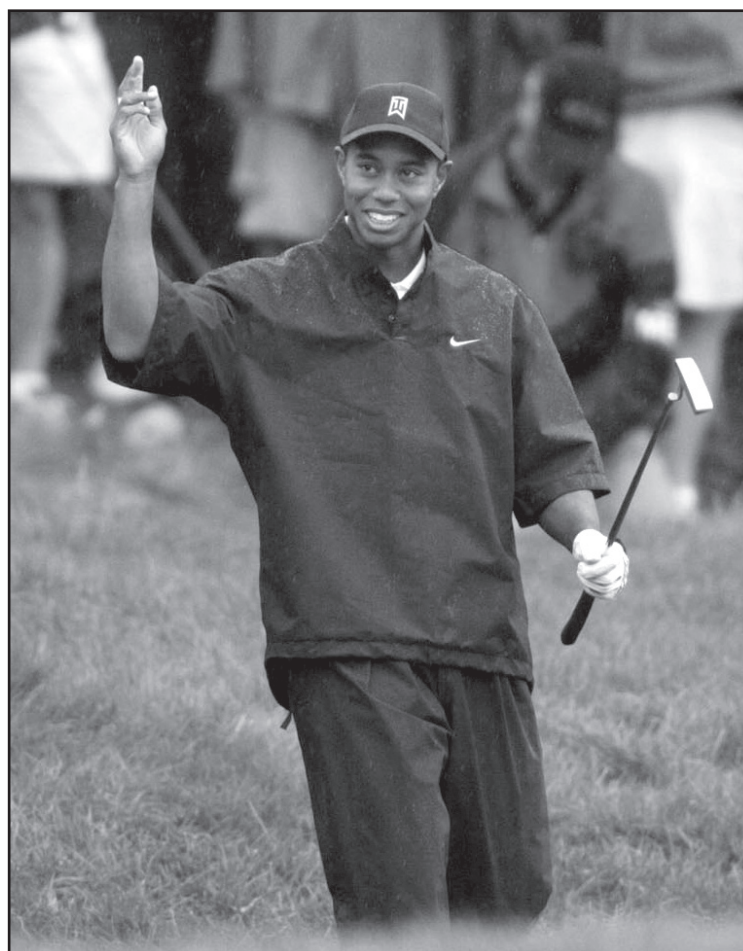
On the whole, the day was quite enjoyable, with fine weather and long walks to find my ball on adjacent fairways. It was humbling to watch my cousin's teenage sons play so much better than me. Yet it was a day with unexpected joys – the par on 18, a straight drive down a narrow fairway, a well-placed pitch in front of a meandering creek.

Within this game are spiritual elements that also serve as lessons for life.

I found some of these lessons in the book "Golf and the Spiritual Life" by Father Mike Linder, a priest in the Knoxville diocese. I lived next to Mike in a dorm room years ago at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, Ill., and we enjoyed a few rounds on the school's golf course.

As I look back over my week-end of family golf, a few of the life lessons from his book come to mind:

Play it as it lies. It's very tempting, especially when no



CNS photo from Reuters

Tiger Woods, perhaps the greatest golfer of all time, devotes hours to practice and hard work, because that's what it takes to get better.

one is looking, to nudge the ball up onto a tuft of grass from a poor lie in the rough, making it easier to hit. Not only is "improving one's lie" against the rules, it also shows that we are not taking responsibility for the swing that drove the ball to the poor lie in the first place.

In golf and life, bad breaks sometimes happen, even when we're doing the best we can.

For that matter, good breaks sometimes happen when we don't do anything at all. By "playing it as it lies," we live honestly with truth behind all our actions.

Focus on the task in front of you. Yes, it can be difficult to focus on one task during golf, as so many things have to happen at the same time: keep your arm straight, bend your knees slightly, etc. etc.

But none of these tasks matter if you are not keeping your eye on the ball and hitting it squarely.

"Be the ball," says Ty Webb (Chevy Chase) to Danny Noonan (Michael O'Keefe) in the hilarious golf film "Caddyshack." Too often I want to see where the ball is going, so I lift my head before the shot is completed, thus changing the position of my hands and the path of the ball. If I had a little more patience, I'd complete one task before looking ahead to another.

Let go of the past and continue to practice. Jack Nicholas writes in his book "Golf and Life" that the most important practice is the time immediately after a round, when that day's swing is still fresh. It's important to forget those bad shots, as they are gone. Instead, work hard now to improve your swing in the future.

On the Web you can find photos of Tiger Woods, age 3, following through his golf swing in perfect form. Most of us would love to have the swing Tiger had at 3. Yet he has reshaped his swing twice through endless hours of practice just to improve and be the best.

If Tiger thinks he can get better, then I've got tons of potential. I think I'll head to the driving range so I can get ready for the next family golf outing.

Christopher Fenoglio cheers for Phil Mickelson and hits Wiffle golf balls at his home in Bellevue. Previous columns can be read at www.christopherfenoglio.com. ☩