

Poverty is the Enemy (Letter to Santa Cruz Sentinel 5/27/06)

Last night, the Locally Owned Business Alliance made public its \$20,000 study on why an increase in the minimum wage is a terrible idea. The economists they hired did their job well; the study is worth reading. Santa Cruzans will debate this subject all summer, as well we should.

But the economists drew one seriously wrong conclusion from their researches, and unfortunately chose to emphasize it in their public presentation. That one should be set straight from the get-go.

Nobody in the Campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage is confused about the difference between chain stores, which draw wealth from the community, and the locally owned businesses upon which all of us depend for the quality of our lives and the well-being of our community. We are regular, loyal patrons of local businesses; we understand that the proposed raise will challenge them; we sympathize with the difficulties that they'll face; and we'll continue to support them both during and after this campaign, just as many of us did after the earthquake.

Local business people are not "the enemy" for CRMW, though they do oppose us vociferously. The enemy is the hard-core, rapidly accelerating poverty of many honest, hard-working neighbors and fellow citizens. LOBA would have served this community better had its economists talked with a few low-wage workers just to get a feel for the challenges of trying to live in Santa Cruz on less than \$20,000 a year.