

STATEMENT BY SEN. BERNARD SANDERS ON THE STOP BEZOS ACT

At a time of massive income and wealth inequality, when the 3 wealthiest people in America own more wealth than the bottom 50 percent and when 52 percent of all new income goes to the top one percent, the American people are tired of subsidizing multi-billionaires who own some of the largest and most profitable corporations in America.

Let me give you just a few examples of what we are talking about.

Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, is the wealthiest person on earth.

Today, his net worth is [\\$168 billion](#), according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

Since the beginning of this year, his wealth has increased by about [\\$260 million](#) – every single day.

Meanwhile, Mr. Bezos continues to pay many thousands of his Amazon employees wages that are so low that they must [rely on](#) food stamps, Medicaid or public housing in order to survive. Programs that are financed by middle class taxpayers.

According to a recent report from the New Food Economy, one out of three Amazon workers in Arizona and 2,400 in Pennsylvania and Ohio need food stamps in order to feed their families.

Further, according to a November 2016 study by the Institute for Local Self- Reliance, warehouse workers at Amazon are paid 9 percent less than the industry average for comparable work nationally, 18 percent less than average in Seattle, 19 percent less than average in Atlanta, and 22 percent less than average in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Last week, I asked Amazon workers to share their experiences with my office about wages and working conditions at this company. Hundreds of them responded.

Let me share just a few of the stories we received:

A former Amazon worker from Tennessee said: “I worked at Amazon for 5 months at 11.00 an hour as a full time employee. I was on snap and had to live with my parents and my 3 children because I could not afford to find a safe location for my family.”

A current Amazon employee in Illinois said: “I work 40 hours a week at \$13.25. I have 2 kids to support. I receive 90 dollars of food stamps ... I don't make enough to eat lunch at work so I split a protein shake between 2 meals to make sure my children eat.”

Another Amazon worker said: “When I started working for Amazon my family was receiving welfare such [as] SNAP (food stamps) and Medicaid. I'm still receiving those benefits because I make so little money even though I work 40 hours a week. Don't get me wrong I like my job (most days) and love my coworkers. It's just really frustrating to watch Bezo's wealth

grow while his employees are literally living pay check to pay check and have to rely on the government to survive.”

A former Amazon worker from North Carolina said: “Been on food stamps (yes snap) the entire time I [have] been working at Amazon -back breaking labor, terrible pay and even worse conditions - no union backing. I feel like a slave and if anyone complains they will fire you on the spot. This is the 21st century sweatshop.”

In April, Amazon reported that half of its workforce makes less than \$28,500 a year – about \$13.67 an hour.

Even that figure is misleading because it doesn’t include an estimated 40% of Amazon’s workforce who are employed through temporary staffing firms.

As we speak, Integrity Staffing Solutions, Amazon’s major temp agency, is posting a job on its website at Amazon’s warehouse in Columbia, South Carolina for “up to \$11.25 an hour.”

On this same website, you can find job postings at Amazon for up to \$12.25 an hour in Phoenix; up to \$12 an hour in Murfreesboro, Tennessee; and up to \$13.25 an hour in Middletown, Delaware.

In other words, the wealthiest person in the world is advertising jobs that pay workers wages that are so low that they have to go on public assistance and be subsidized by the middle class of this country. That’s wrong. That has got to change.

But let me be clear: This discussion is not just about Jeff Bezos and Amazon.

The Walton family of Walmart is the wealthiest family in the country with a net worth of [nearly \\$175 billion](#).

This one family owns [more wealth than the bottom 40 percent of Americans](#).

Meanwhile, just like Amazon, Walmart pays its workers' wages that are so inadequate that many of them are forced to depend upon public assistance programs in order to survive at a cost to taxpayers of some [\\$6.2 billion](#) each and every year.

The fast food industry is another major recipient of corporate welfare.

While the co-owner of Burger King, Jorge Paulo Lemann, has a net worth of more than [\\$25 billion](#), low wages at this fast-food chain cost U.S. taxpayers an estimated [\\$356 million](#) a year.

And Burger King is not alone.

McDonald's workers are actually *encouraged* to [sign up](#) for government assistance — meaning the company fully acknowledges that it pays its employees wages that are non-livable.

Shockingly, [52 percent](#) of all fast food workers rely on public assistance programs to make ends meet.

The wealthy owners of big airlines are also major welfare recipients.

While American Airlines made [nearly \\$2 billion](#) in profits last year and its CEO is on track to make [\\$31 million](#) in total compensation this year, [27 percent](#) of workers at its subsidiary Envoy Air need food stamps and other forms of public assistance in order to live because of the inadequate wages they receive.

The working families and middle class of this country should not have to subsidize the wealthiest people in the United States of America. That's absurd. That's what a rigged economy is all about.

The fact is that if employers in this country simply paid workers a living wage taxpayers would save [about \\$150 billion](#) a year on federal assistance programs and millions of workers would be able to live in dignity and security.

That is why we are proposing legislation to demand that Mr. Bezos, the Walton family of Walmart and other billionaires get off of welfare and start paying their workers a living wage.

Specifically, this bill would establish a 100 percent tax on corporations with 500 or more employees equal to the amount of federal benefits received by their low-wage workers. For example, if a worker at Amazon receives \$2,000 in food stamps, Amazon would be taxed \$2,000 to cover that cost.

Our legislation gives large, profitable employers a choice: Pay workers a living wage or pay for the public assistance programs their low-wage employees are forced to depend upon.

Let us be very clear: We believe that the government has a moral responsibility to provide for the vulnerable – the children, the elderly, the sick and the disabled.

But we do not believe that taxpayers should have to expend huge sums of money subsidizing profitable corporations owned by some of the wealthiest people in this country.