

# ***American Dreams, Blue Collar Realities***

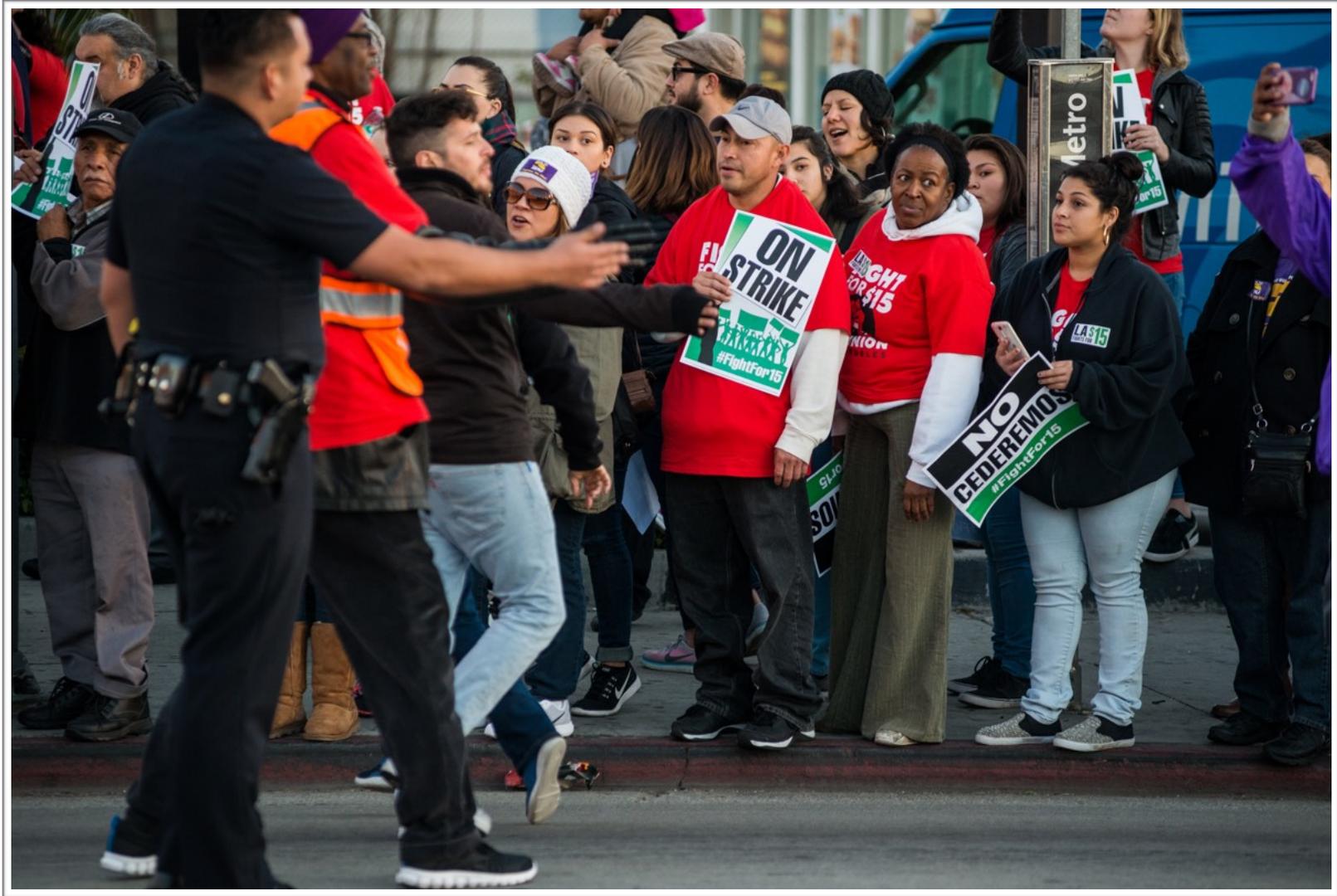
*by Justin L. Stewart*



The overall employment of food and beverage serving workers and related employees is projected to grow 10 percent from 2014 to 2024 -faster than the average for all occupations, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This same workforce has been the face of a push to raise the minimum wage with the Fight for \$15 movement. Fight for \$15 advocates for these workers and holds nationwide demonstrations in the hopes of increasing workers' wages, as well as receiving protection from wage theft, union rights, and other benefits they don't currently receive.

Francisco Zuniga Lazo, 36, is one of those faces. Francisco and his family of four live in Huntington Park in Los Angeles, California. For the past six years, Francisco has worked as a part-time delivery driver for Domino's, a job he settled for after the recession cost him his previous job and almost a year of unemployment. His wife Lennis Lara, 41, makes the lion's share of their income with her job at a child day care center. Francisco dreams of one day buying a house, but doesn't know if that'll ever be a possibility with his and Lennis' economic reality. Between work and his family demands, he feels too overstretched to find time for a better paying job right now. 'Maybe after the kids have grown,' he says.

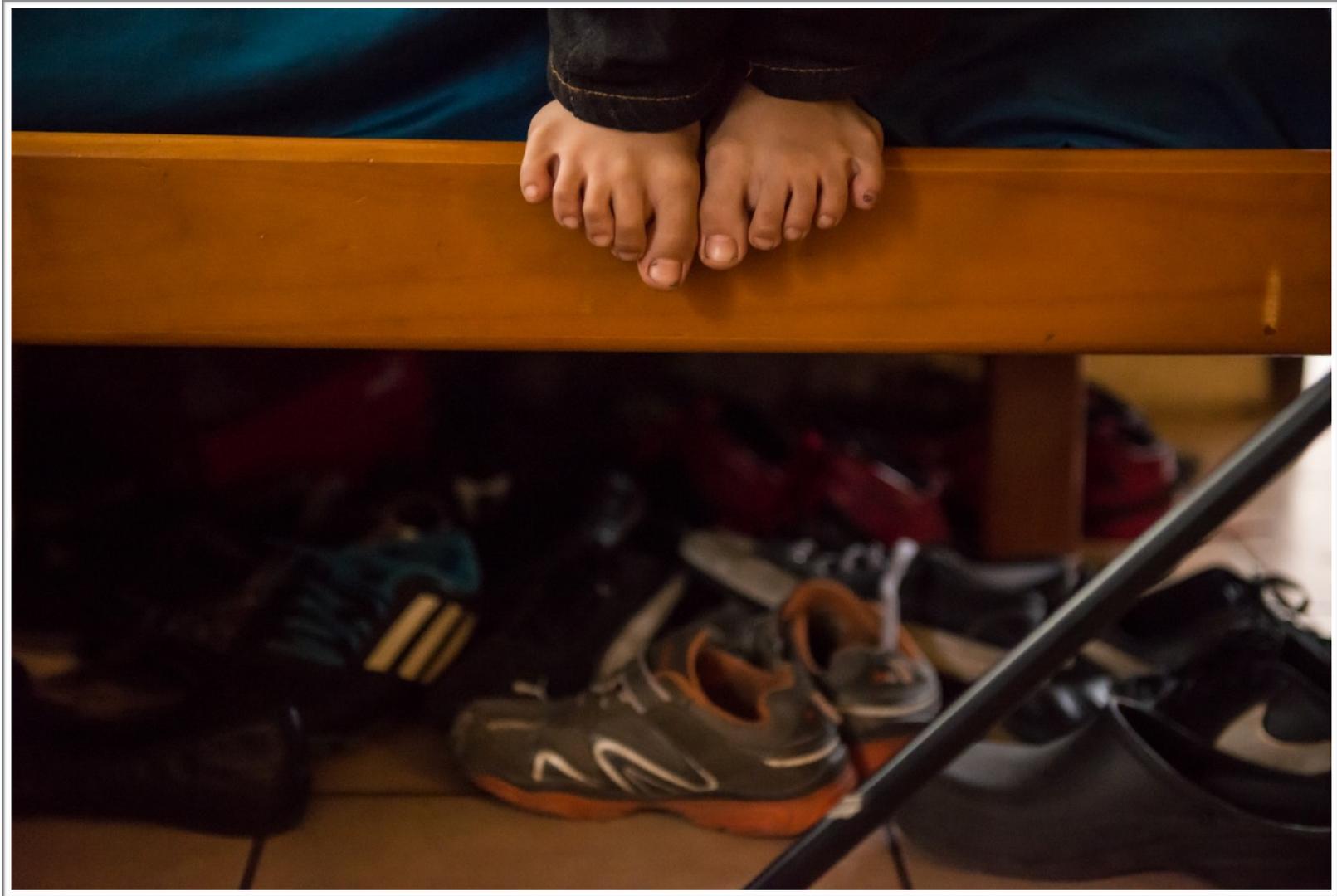
There's some financial relief coming. In March of 2016, following years of protests from the Fight for \$15 movement, California became the first state to raise the minimum wage to \$15. While the raise to \$15 is eagerly welcomed, the wait is long and the relief is slow to be felt. That's especially true for minimum wage workers in Los Angeles, a city with one of the highest costs of living in the United States. The measure doesn't take full effect until 2023 with wages rising in increments of \$1 per year. Until then, people wait for their yearly increments and continue to protest for more workers rights."



Francisco Zuniga Lazo watches as fellow protestors are arrested during a Fight for \$15 protest in downtown Los Angeles, CA early one cold morning, Tuesday, November 29, 2016. Francisco joined the organization in hopes of earning more money for his family by raising the minimum wage. California became the first state to raise the minimum wage to \$15, following years of protests. The measure doesn't take full effect until 2023 with wages rising in increments of \$1 per year. Three million Americans earn the federal minimum wage, \$7.25 an hour, or less, according to 2014 stats from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.



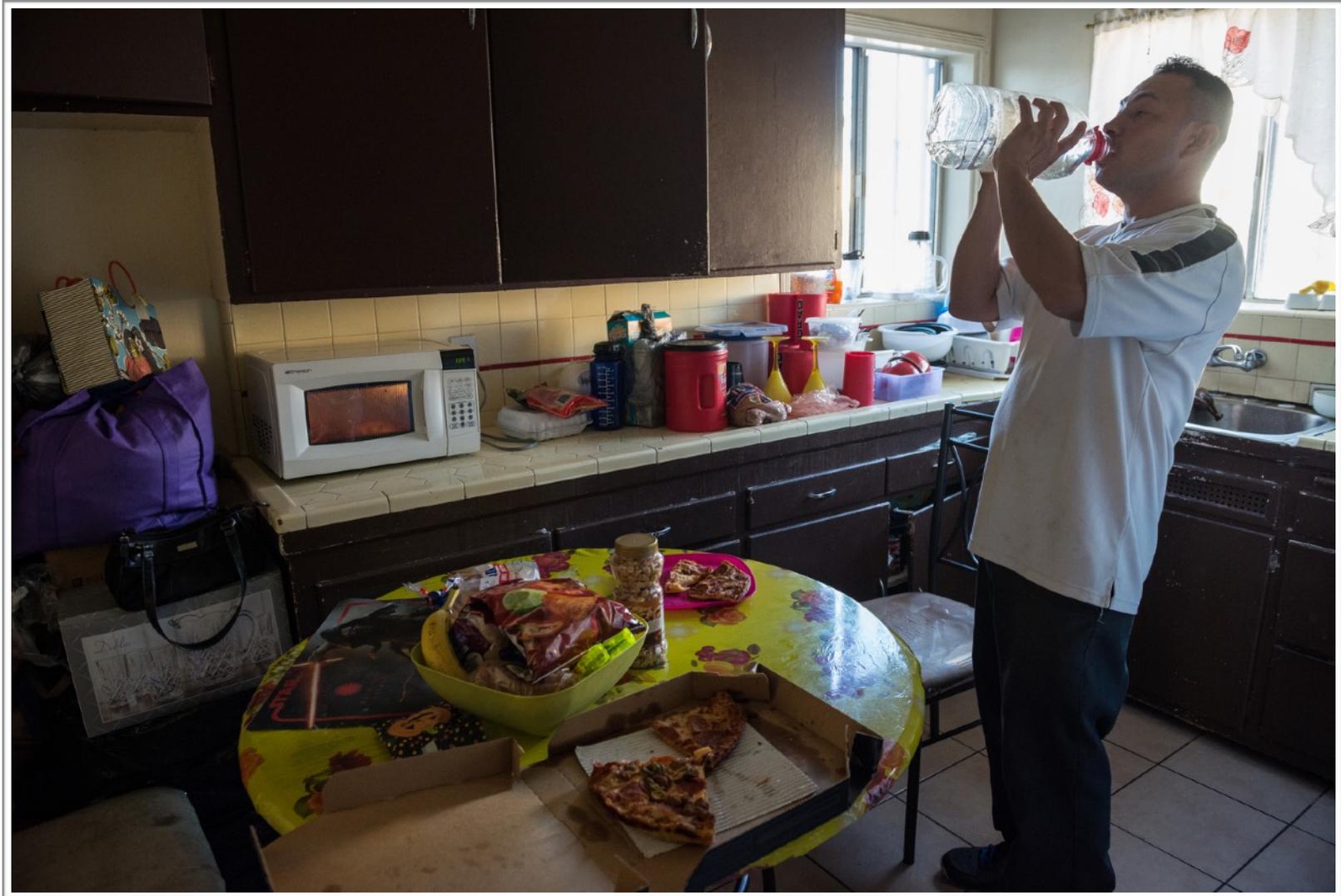
Francisco Zuniga Lazo does housework as his sons David, 6, and Rudy, 10, follow drawing tutorials from the internet Thursday, October 27, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. Francisco usually cares for the children by himself after work, cleaning the house and making dinner before his wife gets home around 7:30 p.m. He encourages his children to follow their passions and dreams, saying whether they want to be illustrators, a doctors, or a policemen - anything they want - he'll support them.



Francisco Zuniga Lazo's youngest son David Zuniga Lazo, 6, sits on the bed in the family living room drawing Thursday, October 27, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. One of the expenses Francisco says he struggles with is affording shoes for his growing children.



David Zuniga Lazo eats a popsicle and watches as Rudy Zuniga Lazo plays one of their video games while resting on their shared bed Thursday, October 27, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. Francisco Zuniga Lazo's family of four shares a one-bedroom apartment in Los Angeles for \$980 plus the varying costs of utilities.



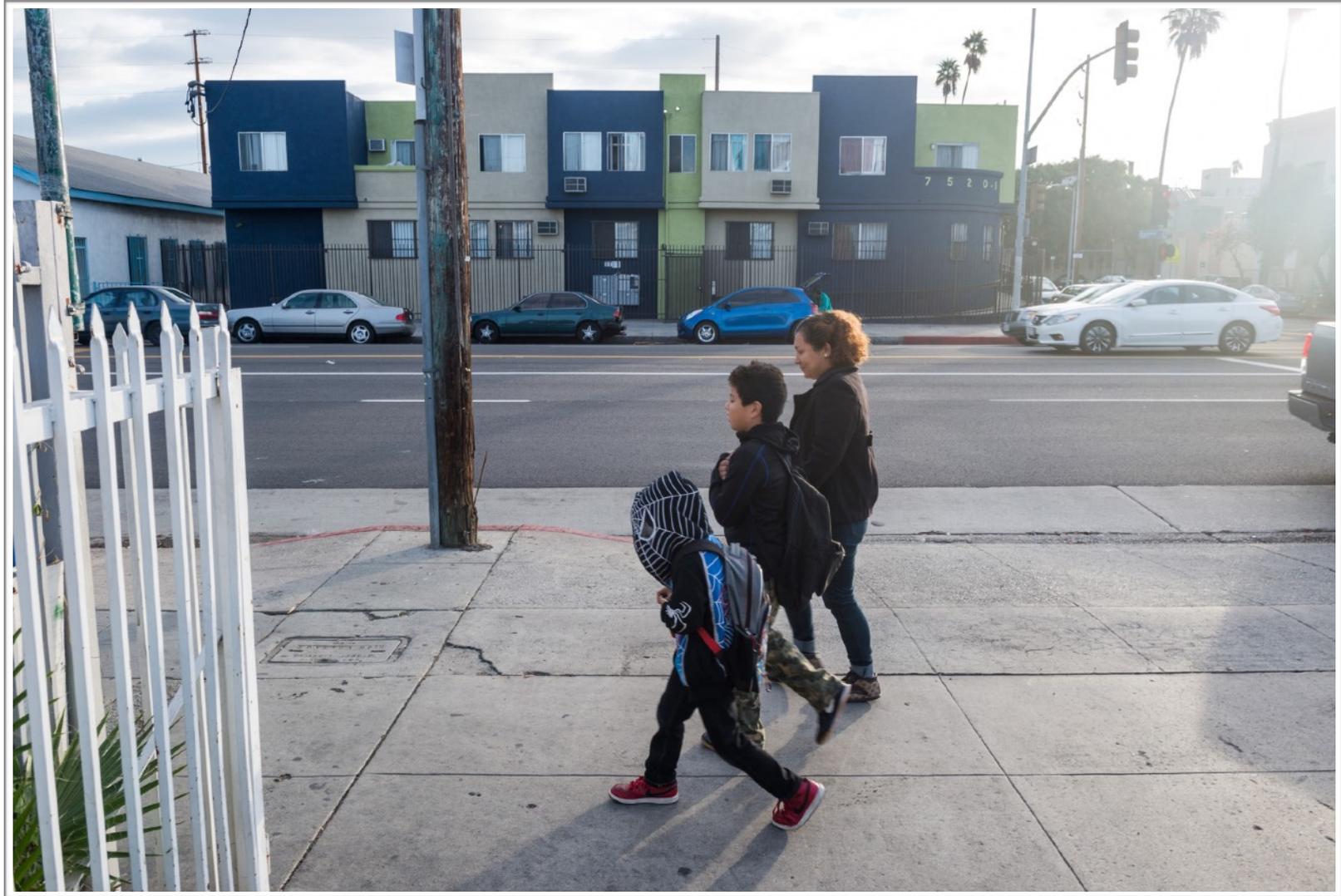
Francisco Zuniga Lazo reheats Domino's pizza while drinking water from a jug in his kitchen Monday, October 31, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. Francisco sometimes brings home pizza for his family that he buys with his employee discount. One of the family's biggest costs is providing food for their growing boys.



Francisco Zuniga Lazo's son David Zuniga Lazo plays a game on a phone in his living room as Francisco ties his shoe while getting ready for work Saturday, November 12, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA.



Lennis Lara takes her sons to the school Monday, November 28, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. She walks them the few blocks from home, every morning before heading off to work. She earned a BA in child development from a local college and earns \$17 an hour working at a daycare in Santa Monica. Her long commute to and from work limits the time she's able to spend with her family.



Lennis Lara takes her sons to the school Monday, November 28, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. She walks them the few blocks from home, every morning before heading off to work, leaving Francisco to pick them up after school. Their neighborhood isn't the nicest or safest, but it's hard for them to find another place so close to a school and police station, which is also only a couple blocks away.



Lennis Lara takes her sons to the school Monday, November 28, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. She walks them the few blocks from home, every morning before heading off to work. There are daycares closer than the one in Santa Monica, but they all pay so much less than the one she works at. She doesn't know how she could justify her degree if she worked at one of the lesser paying daycares.



Francisco Zuniga Lazo finishes checking the fluids in his car before leaving for work Saturday, November 12, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. Without a functional car, he can't deliver pizzas. He says doesn't earn mileage while driving for Domino's and is only given .75 of the \$3.00 deliver charge Domino's puts on each order, though customers often mistake that as the tip for the driver.



Francisco Zuniga Lazo backs his car out of the narrow apartment driveway where it rests space between buildings Saturday, November 12, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. The spot is too tight for his wife's comfort so she parks on the street. Sometimes other cars are parked before his apartment, completely blocking the path to the makeshift parking spot by the front door of his apartment.



Francisco Zuniga Lazo delivers pizzas Saturday, November 12, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. He used to get more hours at work, but when his manager changed stores and a new manager came in, Francisco says everyone lost hours. As a delivery driver at a Domino's, his schedule and hours change every week according to how the manager schedules him. He hopes to change jobs once the children have grown enough to help support themselves.



Francisco Zuniga Lazo navigates traffic while delivering pizzas Saturday, November 12, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. Francisco worked at The Daily Grill in Universal Studios before it closed during the recession. Francisco spent almost a year after that looking for employment. "I thought, 'If I don't find a job quickly, we'll be sleeping under the bridge.'"



Francisco Zuniga Lazo delivers pizzas Saturday, November 12, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. About a week prior, someone stole pizzas out of his car while he was parked delivering an order. Another older driver he works with was physically assaulted and spent a week in the hospital after being robbed by a group of men while delivering pizzas. Another former coworker was held up at gunpoint. Francisco stays in his car while delivering pizzas while he's in neighborhoods he feels unsafe in.



Rudy Zuniga Lazo, 10, and David Zuniga Lazo, 6, eat reheated Domino's pizza after coming home from school Monday, October 31, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. One of the family's biggest costs is providing food for their growing boys and because of Francisco's job as a delivery driver, he often brings home discounted pizza.



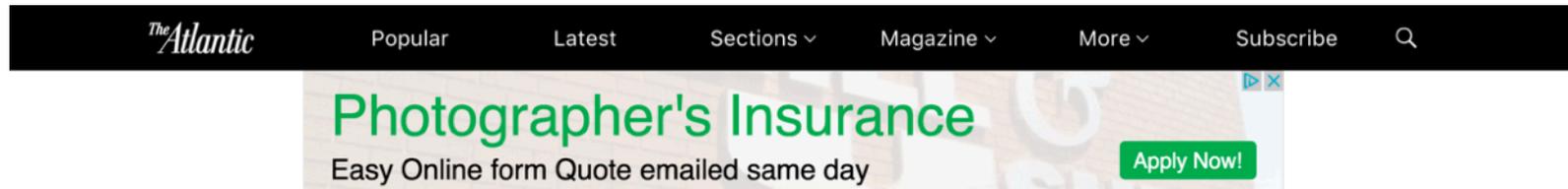
Francisco Zuniga Lazo starts cooking a meal late Monday night after his wife asked him to October 31, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. She often arrives to late to cook any meals. Lennis spent most of her childhood in El Salvador doing such housework for her uncle before immigrating and now she prefers to let Francisco cook. Both Lennis and Francisco immigrated from El Salvador, following family who had already left the country which, in 2016, nearly 1 in 4 people were victims of a crime according to a poll conducted by Central American University. The same poll also said over 40% of Salvadorans hoped to leave the country within a year.



From left, Lennis Lara, David Zuniga Lazo, Francisco Zuniga Lazo and Rudy Zuniga Lazo spend time together in their living room after a day of work and school Wednesday, December 14, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. The family only spends a few hours awake together during each weekday because of Lennis' commute to and from work and the boys' bedtime of approximately 9 p.m. Francisco hopes that once his oldest son Rudy is old enough to work, he might help them save up for a house for them all to live in. He's hopes for a better future.

## Screenshots from the publication of the project in *The Atlantic* in January 2017

This project was published along with 11 other stories in *The Atlantic* as part of their Americans at Work series.



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of The Atlantic website. The logo "The Atlantic" is on the left. Navigation links include "Popular", "Latest", "Sections" (with a dropdown arrow), "Magazine" (with a dropdown arrow), "More" (with a dropdown arrow), "Subscribe", and a search icon. Below the navigation bar is a banner advertisement for "Photographer's Insurance" with the text "Easy Online form Quote emailed same day" and a green "Apply Now!" button.

# Americans at Work: Struggling to Make Ends Meet

ALAN TAYLOR AND EMILY ANNE EPSTEIN | JAN 28, 2017 | 22 PHOTOS | IN FOCUS

This week, our “Americans at Work” photo essay features photographs of a working family in Los Angeles, made by photographer [Justin L. Stewart](#): “The overall employment of food and beverage serving workers and related employees is projected to grow 10 percent from 2014 to 2024 - faster than the average for all occupations, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This same workforce has been the face of a push to raise the minimum wage with the Fight for \$15 movement. Fight for \$15 advocates for these workers and holds nationwide demonstrations in the hopes of increasing workers’ wages, as well as receiving protection from wage theft, union rights, and other benefits they don’t currently receive.

Francisco Zuniga Lazo is one of those faces. Francisco and his family of four live in Huntington Park in Los Angeles, California. For the past six years, Francisco has worked as a part-time delivery driver for Domino’s, a job he settled for after the recession cost him his previous job and almost a year of unemployment. His wife Lennis Lara makes the lion’s share of their

hopes of increasing workers' wages, as well as receiving protection from wage theft, union rights, and other benefits they don't currently receive.

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**HINTS:** View this page [full screen](#). Skip to the next and previous photo by typing j/k or ←/→.





1. Francisco Zuniga Lazo (center, wearing hat) participates in a Fight for \$15 protest in downtown Los Angeles early one cold morning. Francisco joined the organization in hopes of earning more money for his family by raising the minimum wage. California became the first state to raise the minimum wage to \$15, following years of protests. #



2. Francisco and his family of four live in Huntington Park in Los Angeles, California, making ends meet with his part-time job at Domino's earning minimum wage and his wife's job at a child daycare center. #

© Justin L. Stewart





3. Francisco's wife Lennis takes the boys to the school, just a few blocks from home, every morning before heading off to work. She earned a BA in child development from a local college and earns just above minimum wage working at a daycare in Santa Monica. Between Francisco and her's wages, they make about \$2,000 a month after taxes. #



4. A space heater attempts to warm the apartment as Francisco's wife Lennis prepares to head off to work. #

© Justin L. Stewart





5. Lennis gives Francisco a kiss on her way to work. #

© Justin L. Stewart





6. Francisco cleans his bedroom that he shares with his wife and his children in their one-bedroom apartment. #

© Justin L. Stewart





7. Francisco checks out TracFone's cellphone options as his children play in the kitchen and living room.

#

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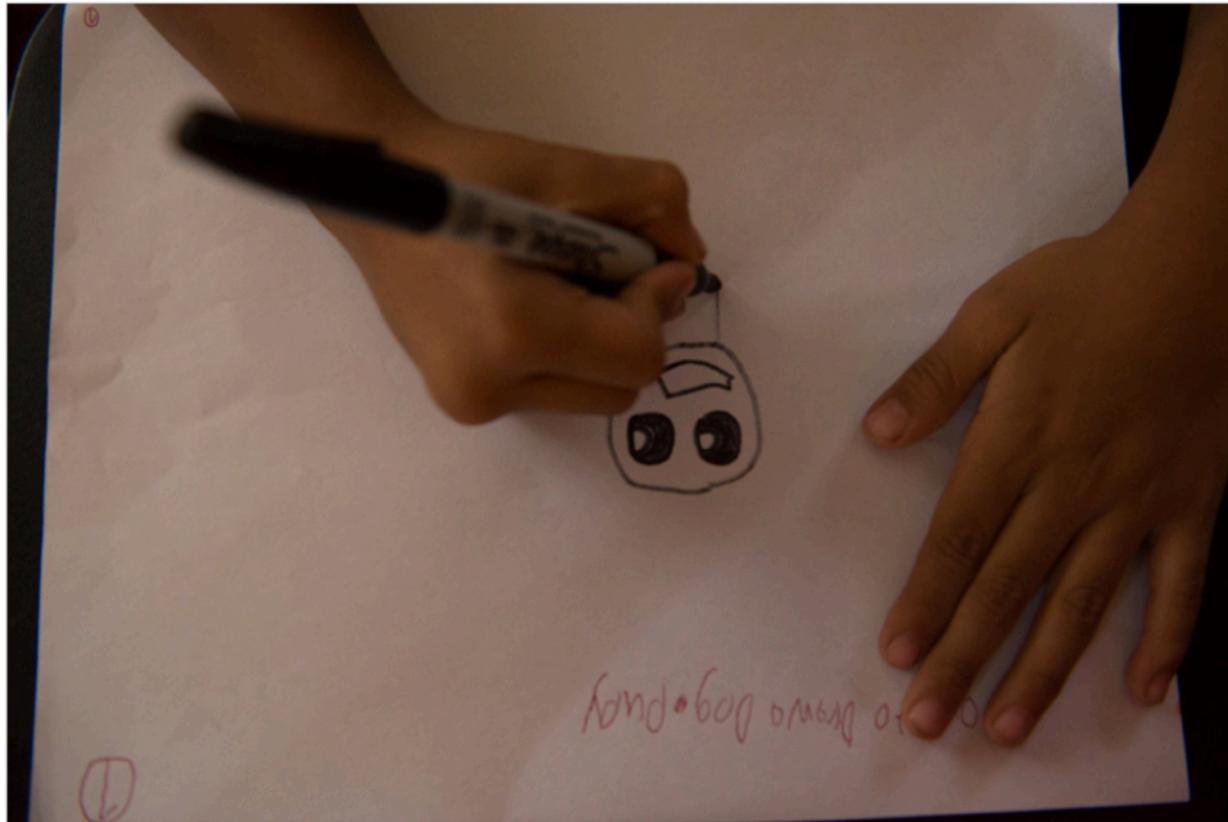




8. Francisco's youngest son David sits on the bed in the family living room. One of the expenses Francisco says he struggles with is affording shoes for his growing children. #

© Justin L. Stewart





9. Francisco's son David draws a picture after school. Francisco tries to cultivate his children's talents. "They are our future." #

© Justin L. Stewart





10. Francisco puts on his shoes before leaving for work as his son David plays a video game. #

© Justin L. Stewart





11. Francisco checks the fluids in his car before leaving for work. Without a functional car, he can't deliver pizzas. He doesn't earn mileage while driving for Domino's and is only given .75 of the \$3.00 delivery charge Domino's puts on each order, though customers often mistake that as the tip for the driver. #

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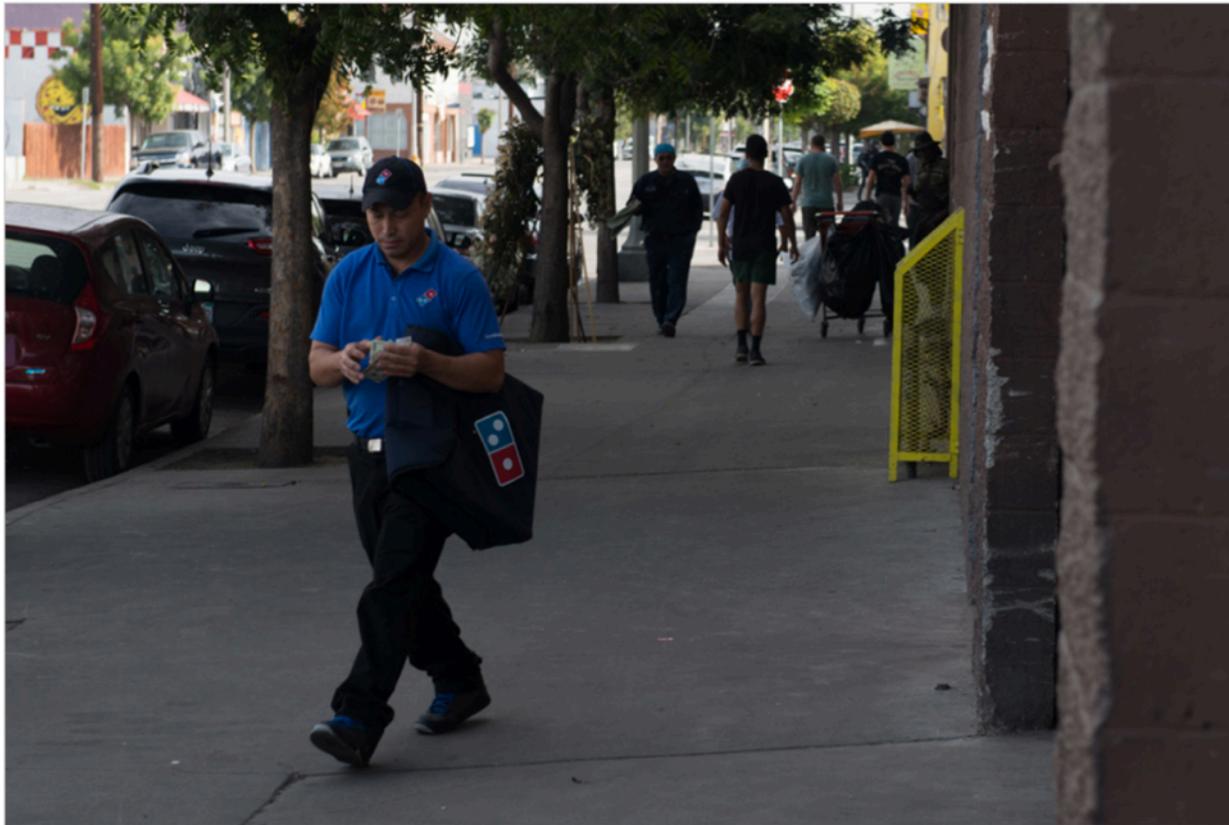


12. Francisco changes into his work shirt in the parking lot of Domino's before starting his shift. Francisco works about 32 hours a week, though it varies. He says he used to get more hours before his manager changed stores and he started working with a new one, who cut hours for multiple people. #

© Justin J. Stewart



13. Francisco delivers pizzas. About a week prior, someone stole pizzas out of his car while he was parked delivering another pizza. Another older driver he works with was physically assaulted and spent a week in the hospital after being robbed by a group of men while delivering pizzas. He says he stays in his car while delivering pizzas while he's in neighborhoods where he feels unsafe. #



14. Francisco counts cash after handing off a delivery. #

© Justin L. Stewart





15. Rudy and David eat Domino's pizza after school. Francisco gets about a 35% discount on pizza at his work, making it a semi-regular staple of the family's diet. #

© Justin L. Stewart





16. Francisco checks out cellphone options as his children play in the living room. #

© Justin L. Stewart





17. Francisco cooks a dinner of fish, celery, and potatoes in a new crockpot for his wife. Francisco is the cook in the family, often making dinner for his boys while Lennis is caught in traffic on her way home from work in Santa Monica. #

© Justin L. Stewart



18. The Lazo boys play in the family's living room. #

© Justin L. Stewart





19. Francisco and his boys play at a local Harvest Festival held by a church a block away from their home on Halloween. The family doesn't go out trick or treating. They worry about what people might put in the candy and usually just buy candy for the children. #

© 2014 Excolvar



20. David runs to Francisco with a handful of candy at a local Harvest Festival on Halloween. #

© Justin L. Stewart





21. Francisco's son Rudy runs back to get more candy after dropping some off to his dad at the Harvest Festival. #

© Justin L. Stewart





22. Francisco participates in a Fight for \$15 protest in downtown Los Angeles, California. California became the first state to raise the minimum wage to \$15, following years of protests. The measure doesn't take full effect until 2023 with wages rising in increments of \$1 per year. Three million Americans earn the federal minimum wage, \$7.25 an hour, or less, according to 2014 stats from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. #