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Wages should rise with prices

With apologies to the band "They Might Be Giants," minimum wage (yee-aa!) is an ongoing political whipping boy. Year in and year out, Democrats can demand a minimum-wage increase in order to show their labor roots and appear righteously indignant to any opposition. Republicans get to argue against any increase and cry about small businesses while also representing the interests of larger corporations, which don't like minimum-wage increases even if they can afford them.

The Emerald editorial board, then, was very pleased to hear that Reps. Diane Rosenbaum, D-Southeast Portland, and Bill Morrisette, D-Springfield, have introduced a minimum-wage bill with a new outlook on the issue. Despite being introduced and supported so far only by Democrats, this bill would make an excellent law and begin the process of helping small businesses cope with needed minimum-wage increases. Students, who very often pay for college or raise extra money by working minimum-wage jobs, would be especially well served by this bill and should get involved to help make it a law.

The first big change offered in HB 2786 is that the minimum wage would be adjusted every year. This will help depoliticize the process by removing the issue from the partisan landscape and making it a part of how Oregon does business. Instead of arguing about wages every few years, lawmakers could focus on more support for small businesses.

The other paradigm shift — and this is the important part of the bill — is that the yearly minimum-wage increase would be tied to the U.S. City Average Consumer Price Index, or the CPI. The CPI indexes a "market basket" of average goods and services purchased in urban or metropolitan areas. Every few years, the Bureau of Labor and Statistics surveys more than 5,000 families to determine what they buy, and then each month surveys retail prices of about 80,000 items. After a series of grueling mathematical calculations, the CPI is released.

So under the proposed law, every September the commissioner of Oregon's Bureau of Labor and Industries would adjust the minimum wage exactly the same amount that the CPI changed. If consumer prices increased 5 percent, so would the minimum wage. This is a sane, rational approach to wage raises, because it reflects how businesses are doing and it doesn't demand a large percentage increase all at one time, which can unfairly



burden small businesses.

If the CPI increases, businesses are collecting more money for products and are ostensibly seeing profits increase as well. In an average sense, this bill is ensuring that workers, as well

as businesses, enjoy the success of the economy. It also helps assure working parents that they will continue to be able to put food on the table as the cost of that food increases.

The possibility exists that

this increase, however moderate and rational, will still hinder some small businesses. In addition to supporting this minimum-wage bill, we also feel the Legislature should find some carefully targeted tax breaks or supportive incentives to make sure small businesses can afford to pay workers a decent wage and still remain in business. It doesn't make sense to improve the lot of workers at the expense of small businesses, which employ so many of those workers.

Perhaps the Legislature could explore subsidizing some of the costs of health insurance plans or reducing payroll taxes for small businesses. In extreme cases, maybe some of the cost of the minimum-wage increase could be subsidized by the state so that at-risk businesses can remain financially solvent. There must also be other solutions out there to help businesses that would be threatened by a rising minimum wage.

Students should be excited about this minimum-wage bill. Get involved and help make it happen. But don't let this bill be the end of the discussion. We all need to find additional solutions to the minimum-wage issue that ensure everyone is getting a fair shake.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

Letters to the editor

Bailey is dedicated, moral

Eric Bailey is an excellent choice for ASUO Executive. I have never known anyone more dedicated to a school and its student body.

From being in many meetings with Bailey, I know that he strives to make sure all the voices are heard and each person is satisfied with the outcome. One of his chief concerns is that the process be democratic.

Bailey is one of the most friendly people that anyone could get to know here at the University. He cares very deeply about the many issues affecting students. Renters' rights are one of his top priorities. He wants to make sure students have a say in the implementation of a housing code.

Another major concern of Bailey's is safety. He wants to make sure students not only feel safe while on campus, but also while they are walking to and from it.

Bailey's third major goal is to mend relations between the ASUO, the administration and student groups, and between housing and Greek Life.

One other note: Eric is a man of very strong morals that will not allow him to participate in dirty mudslinging and cheap political maneuvering.

I strongly support Bailey and Oliver for ASUO Executive. Vote Bailey/Oliver Feb. 26 through March 1!

Jennifer Ames
 freshman
 pre-journalism

Bret and Matt for real leadership

It has been said that specificity is a character issue. If so, student voters should choose Bret [Jacobson] and Matt [Cook] in the upcoming ASUO Executive elections because they have been the only candidates to demonstrate such character. Bret and Matt have already shown a pattern of listening to student and government concerns and by responding with specific, unique solutions that no other candidates are able to offer.

Bret and Matt's plan to create an ASUO-sponsored public-relations hub to advance the causes and awareness of various student groups is just one great example. Other ideas include holding weekly meetings with multicultural groups to constantly remain updated on diversity issues and to help solve problems, while having more student leaders on Eugene Police Department ride-alongs to work toward their goal of improving often strained relationships with the police and city government.

Other candidates either won't commit to any specific ideas to improve the ASUO or are incapable of the kind of problem solving this University demands. They keep rehashing the same old lines, while only paying lip service to the important issues of improving education, diversity and trying to get along better with the City Council. That's not a representative government and should not be acceptable.

Please make the effort to sign onto Duck Web to vote for Bret and Matt, so next year the University can have real leadership with specific ideas.

Jason Schroeder
 junior
 business

Leftfield

2008...

Well, it's been a great eight years

I accomplished my AGENDA!

me, John and anton in overturned that pesky Rowree wade...

Christie, Dick, Don and Gail got the rigs a-pumpin'!

My tax cut was very effective... thanks George!

But now it's time for a change!

At least we don't have to deal with Florida

Frank Silva

CORRECTION

In Thursday's Q & A with ASUO Executive candidates Nilda Brooklyn and Joy Nair, the names on the photographs were inadvertently switched. The Emerald regrets the error.