

# E. Oregon farmers, businesses oppose wage hike plans

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

SALEM — Forty-six people from Malheur County, half of them involved with agriculture, traveled 400 miles across icy roads Jan. 14 to Salem to tell Oregon lawmakers that increasing the state's minimum wage would devastate Eastern Oregon's economy.

The group, which wore "Any raise equals lost jobs" stickers on their backs, were heavily outnumbered by supporters of the various proposals to significantly raise the state's minimum wage, who loudly chanted, "Hey, hey, ho, ho, poverty wages have got to go" as they entered the Capitol.

After arriving in Salem following an eight-hour bus ride, the Eastern Oregon contingent was told they could not carry their picket signs to counter-demonstrate at a rally held on the Capitol steps in support of a minimum wage increase.

They were told that state police decided there was a high risk of a conflict occurring and were concerned about their safety.

But members of the Republican minority party



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Malheur County residents hold signs opposing the various proposals that would raise Oregon's minimum wage Jan. 14 on the steps at the back of the state's Capitol. Forty-six farmers, business owners and others traveled 400 miles to make their voices heard.

praised them for making the trip and told them their presence at the statehouse was a loud message.

Though outnumbered, testimony during a three-hour public hearing on the issue was split between supporters and opponents because committee members gave preference to people who had traveled more than 100 miles.

The group traveled by charter bus and headed back to Ontario after the meeting to complete its 800-mile round trip.

"Coming from 400 miles away and spending (more than a day) getting here and back is unbelievably powerful," said Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, who helped organize the event along with farm industry leaders.

"I can't tell you how important it was for you to have come here today," said Sen. Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day. "The fight you are making today is the fight that may be the key skirmish in this whole (issue)." During public testimony,



Gordon Friedman/Statesman-Journal via AP  
An audience member wears a sticker on his back opposing wage increases during a public hearing on proposals to raise the minimum wage at the Oregon Capitol in Salem.

the Malheur County residents told legislators that increasing the state's minimum wage any amount would result in businesses and jobs moving to Idaho.

They reminded them that Oregon's minimum wage of \$9.25 is already \$2 higher than Idaho's rate of \$7.25 and Malheur County borders Idaho.

Owyhee Produce General Manager Shay Myers said that if Oregon increases its minimum wage, it will force his onion packing facility to automate or move to Idaho. Either option kills Oregon jobs, he added.

As an example, he said that increasing Oregon's minimum wage to \$13.50 would increase Owyhee Produce's overall costs by 10 percent, while the company's margin is only 8 percent, Myers said.

If it comes down to staying in business, "There's really only one decision for us to make," he said. "And if we're going to stay in business, it's either automate or move to Idaho."

Tim Newton, who has worked for Peterson Farms in Nyssa for 26 years, said a lot of businesses would move to the Idaho side if the minimum wage goes up.

"What we're hearing is that the majority of the onion sheds (in the area) will be moving to the Idaho side because of the difference in the minimum wage," he said.

Nyssa farmer Paul Skeen and others asked the state to leave Malheur County out of any minimum wage increase because farmers and businesses there compete directly with their Idaho counterparts.

"Carve us out (of any increase) and save our jobs," he said. "You're going to ruin us if you don't."

The Malheur County con-

tingent included several small business owners, who said that if agriculture suffers because of a minimum wage increase, they will suffer also.

If the minimum wage increases, "our onion shippers will move to Idaho," said John Kirby, a hardware business owner. "It's not a threat, it's a promise; they will move to Idaho."

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown defended her minimum wage proposal, which she released while the Eastern Oregon group was en route.

It would raise the minimum wage outside the Portland area by \$1 in 2017 and gradually increase it to \$13.50 by 2022. The Portland area minimum wage would be set at 15 percent above the statewide rate and would increase to \$15.52 by 2022.

Phasing in the increase over several years will provide "a glide path for Oregon businesses to plan and prepare for the increase," said Brown, who added that a single parent in Oregon would have to work 72 hours a week or make \$16.61 an hour to afford the state's average monthly cost of \$864 for a two-bedroom apartment.

## Mountain snows that feed Colorado River look good so far

By DAN ELLIOTT  
Associated Press

DENVER — Snowpack in the mountains that feeds the Colorado River is slightly above the long-term average this winter — welcome news in the drought-stricken Southwest.

But water and weather experts said Tuesday it's too early to predict how deep the snow will get or how much of it will make its way into the river and on to Lake Powell in Utah and Arizona, one of two major reservoirs on the Colorado.

"We are cautiously optimistic, but nature has a way of doing what it wants," said Chris Watt, a spokesman for

the federal Bureau of Reclamation, which manages the water in Lake Powell.

The Colorado River serves about 40 million people and 6,300 square miles of farmland in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. Mexico is also entitled to a share of the water.

Lake Powell, behind the 580-foot-high Glen Canyon Dam, has a key role in regulating and distributing the river.

Some people worry there won't be enough water in the river to go around in the future because of protracted drought, climate change and unrealistic estimates about how much water was available in the first place. Lake Powell is only about

half full after multiple dry years.

April is the key time for predicting how much water will flow into the lake from the annual spring snowmelt in the Rocky Mountains, Watt said. The bulk of the snow has fallen by then, and the runoff has begun.

As of Tuesday, the accumulated snowfall was 104 percent of normal in the Upper Colorado River Basin, which includes the western half of Colorado, the eastern half of Utah and smaller portions of Wyoming, New Mexico and Arizona.

The river begins near the Continental Divide in Colorado, inside Rocky Mountain National Park.

Most forecasts call for average or above-average water

flow in the upper Colorado River and other waterways in the state, Colorado state climatologist Nolan Doesken said, but the snow season is only about half over and the picture could change quickly.

"We haven't gotten so much snow that we're assured of an average or above-average runoff," Doesken said. "It could turn on us."

The El Nino weather pattern is likely a factor in the healthy snowpack so far this winter, Doesken said. "There's clearly been a much better flow of Pacific moisture this year than in the last few (years) in terms of the midwinter time period, and that's sort of consistent with El Nino," he said.

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**JD 9650STS**, 3,112 hours, sm grain, 18% Hillco leveler, grass seed combine, 914P BPU.....**\$118,000** Salem OS700523

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**JD J670**, 1,127 hours, small grain, MacDon BPU platform (grass seed combine).....**\$184,900** Donald OA084501

**JD 9770STS**, 3,688 hours, small grain, level land, 635F platform and Cart, 4WD, 520-42 duals.....**\$189,000** Colfax A0750701

**JD 5690**, 799 hours, small grain, Hillco 27% leveler, 4WD, 2630 disp and SF3 receiver...**\$478,000** Moscow 755344

**JD 5690**, 614 hours, small grain, Hillco 27% leveler, 635F platform and cart...**\$526,000** Walla Walla D0765123

**JD 9870STS**, 2,335 hours, 35% Rahco leveler, 4WD, 635F platform with cart.....**\$289,000** Colfax OS730229

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