

What does the minimum wage mean for Oregon's workers?

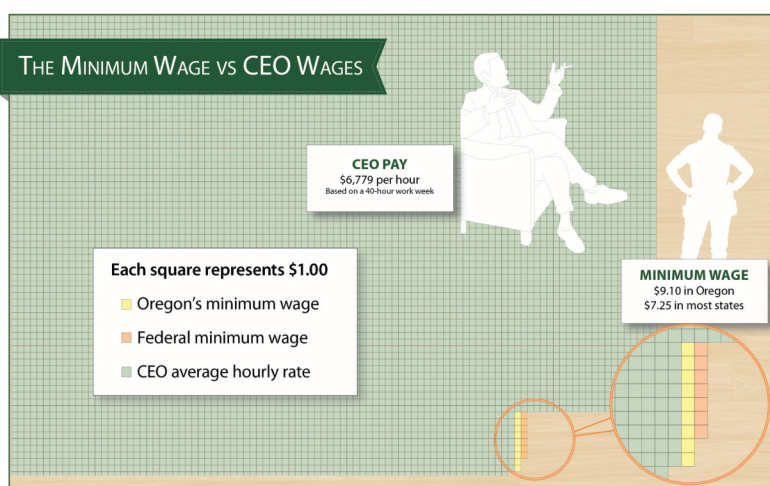
Oregon is one of 13 states that annually increases its minimum wage to keep pace with rising costs of inflation. Despite this, many Oregonians are still struggling to make ends meet and are actually living below the poverty line even while working a 40-hour week for minimum wage.

The Oregon AFL-CIO released a series of informational graphics to call attention to three compelling reasons for a higher minimum wage: poverty, positive impact on other wages and a comparison of the minimum wage to the average pay of a CEO.

"For me, it's very simple" said Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain. "We've seen more people moving to Oregon in the past year than any other state. We have exceptionally high rates of hunger and

poverty in parts of the state. Minimum wage jobs are not just the summer jobs we picture from when we were in high school. It's become abundantly clear that Oregon's workers need more than inflation adjustment; we need a minimum wage that can support a family. Otherwise, we're going to see more folks continue to struggle and need more and more assistance to make ends meet even as the economy improves."

The graphics show that raising the minimum wage has a direct impact on increasing the number of jobs higher on the income scale too, that the poverty level is higher than the expected income of a minimum wage worker, and that CEOs are seeing a staggering level of profit by keeping the minimum wage low.



PREPARED BY THE OREGON AFL-CIO • A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S MIDDLE CLASS

Senate GOP blocks three month UI extension

59 senators support the effort, but it's one shy of the 60 needed to break a GOP filibuster

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Senate Republicans for the third time blocked labor-backed legislation to extend unemployment insurance (UI) benefits for three months. More than 1.7 million out-of-work Americans have missed out on benefits since the federal Emergency Unemployment Compensation program expired at the end of 2013. The program provided extra weeks of benefits to laid-off workers who used up the standard six months of state benefits. The program was introduced in 2008 during the Great Recession.

Fifty-nine senators, including four Republicans, voted to extend the UI insurance benefits. That was one vote short of the 60 needed to end a Republican-led "silent" filibuster. A silent filibuster allows a senator to block a bill without actually talking for hours on the Senate floor.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) initially voted to halt debate, but had to switch his vote to "no," so he could bring the measure up again in the future. That made the official vote count 58-40.

"This isn't how it's supposed to work. In a democracy, that should be enough," said U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Oregon).

The GOP's action prompted renewed calls for more filibuster reform.

Last year, pressure from a wide mix of voters and lawmakers (such as Merkley) led to a change in Senate rules that ended silent filibusters for all presidential nominations and judges, except for Supreme Court justices. However, it kept the 60-vote filibuster threshold for legislation.

Merkley said more filibuster reform is needed to alleviate gridlock in the U.S. Senate.

"The way the Senate does business is fundamentally broken," he said. "Debate on the issues is healthy, but a 'silent' filibuster that allows Republicans to stop everything in its tracks without even coming to the floor of the Senate is just wrong. It needs to end."

The labor-backed coalition, Fix The Senate Now, said it will continue to push for further filibuster reforms throughout 2014.

If nothing else, union officials say Reid should at least implement the "talking filibuster," which would require a lawmaker to actively hold the floor in order to block legislation.

... Lafer report: Legislative attack on American labor standards

(From Page 7)

other kinds of public benefits.

You didn't address this is the report, but is there a counter-agenda that's also national, an pro-worker ALEC counterpart?

In the biggest sense, no. Labor is playing a different hand than the other side. Business has vastly more resources. Labor is never going to win by outspending the other side. One of the strengths labor has is people, but it only has that if it uses it. The first "paycheck protection" campaign (barring public sector union dues collection) was in 1998, California's Proposition 226. When it started, polls showed majority support not only among the public as a whole but among union members. The AFL-CIO put a ton of resources into beating it back, and after they beat it, they did a poll of people who'd started off supporting and ended up opposing, and where they got information. It turned out talking to a coworker at work was 20 points more effective than anything else.

To use that, you'd have to not

treat union members the same as other volunteers who get plugged into a phone bank script. Instead, you'd need to have hundreds of union members who are trained and feel confident to have five- to 20-minute conversations with people at work, or in their neighborhoods or churches. That's a big commitment. But it's an example of how the labor movement could play to a strength that its opponents do not have.

What about the labor caucus of the National Conference of State Legislatures? They share model "pro-worker" legislation.

They share ideas. But they don't have the money to bring people together at meetings, to run campaigns, to threaten politicians who do the wrong thing with being primaried, to run endless TV and radio ads, to fund think tanks in every state. Sharing model legislation is just one small part of the ALEC formula. Labor needs to have ideas that are dramatic enough that they galvanize the public imagination. That's what you have with the minimum wage. You don't need a mes-

saging consultant to talk about the minimum wage. I think that's true about K-12 class size too. There are other issues like that. If you said, "tax the rich and create jobs," I would guess that phrase by itself would poll enormously high. On the other hand, if it's, "increase the excise tax 0.75 percent and devote it these five funding streams," it may be the right policy, but it's kind of an inside game.

If the labor movement's only competitive advantage is people, then it needs something that's going to galvanize people. It has to be something dramatic that captures people's imagination. Figure out what is workable, winnable, even in a couple of states. In the same way that people in Oregon volunteered to phone bank Wisconsin, or donated money to support people occupying the capitol in Madison, I think people in lots of parts of the country would rally around a fight, even if it was in one state, that really captured their idea of what a fair economy is.

But there's not a national legislative agenda. I think the national unions are struggling to turn a cor-

ner from defensive to offensive, ever since being caught by surprise by Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker in 2011. SO much resources have been spent keeping their head above water that the effort to get on offense has been slow in coming.

I think many people in the country can say what the labor movement is against, which is everything — "stop kicking us in the head." But many fewer people can say what is the labor movement's vision of how the economy should work in a fair or just or humane economy. I think nothing forces you to crystallize that vision more than a ballot initiative. If the labor movement in even one state said, "Here's our plan: We want to tax the rich and create jobs, or guarantee everyone a decent retirement, or universal preschool . . .," the lessons from polling data suggest that there are a bunch of issues where there's grounds to go on offense. I would think the national labor movement should be looking at that, and Oregon might be one of the places they look to, because it's one of the places the labor movement has the competence to carry something out.