

...Up with the minimum wage: A Movement on the Rise

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can). It needs 218 signatures to force a vote, which would show the public where members of Congress stand.

On April 30, 2014, supporters in the U.S. Senate tried to move forward with companion bill, S 2223. It got 54 votes — a majority, but not enough to break the Senate's filibuster rule, which in practice requires 60 votes to move any

bill to a final vote. [Senator Bob Corker of Tennessee was the only Republican to vote in favor.]

The Republican obstruction comes at a time of particularly strong public support for an increase: In a November 2013 Gallup poll, 76 percent of Americans favored raising the federal minimum wage to at least \$9, and 69 percent favored indexing it to inflation. Even among Republicans, 58 percent

favored the increase to \$9. In separate polls of small business owners, 57 percent said they support increasing the federal minimum, and 47 percent favored an increase to \$9.50.

In February 2013, President Barack Obama called for the minimum wage to increase to \$9. By February 2014, that sounded too paltry, and he proposed \$10.10, the figure in Rep. Miller's bill. But minimum wage campaigners don't

see HR 1010 as likely to pass in the current Congress. With the bill blocked in both chambers, Obama acted on his own, issuing an executive order requiring certain federal contractors to pay \$10.10 an hour starting January 2015.

In 1968, when the federal minimum wage was at its buying-power peak, only one state — Alaska — had a higher minimum wage. By 1998, six states did. By 2008, 22 states were above the federal minimum. Today over half of Americans — 54 percent — live in the 22 states that have a minimum wage higher than the federal minimum. And 10 of those states, starting with Washington in 2001, increase the minimum annually based on inflation. [Oregon voters did that in 2002, passing Ballot Measure 25.]

With minimum wage bills blocked in Washington, D.C., the battle has shifted from Congress to the states, and from the states to the cities. And perhaps nowhere has the battle raged more intensely than the Seattle area.

around the nation

SeaTac's \$15-an-hour ballot measure didn't appear out of nowhere. It was the final solution to a decade-long union fight that started when airlines, particularly Alaska Airlines, ended airport work as a source of middle class wages. Ramp workers, jet fuelers and cabin cleaners found their work outsourced to private contractors, accompanied by savage wage cuts. Unions tried repeatedly to unionize the new employers, but faced insurmountable legal obstacles under the National Railway Labor Act.

At length, a union coalition known as the SeaTac Good Jobs Committee appealed to the Port of Seattle, the elected body in charge of the airport, to use its power to set a decent minimum wage. Port commissioners shrugged their shoulders, saying they wished they could help, but that they lacked legal authority to do so. In 2009, the union coalition ran an independent campaign to elect a more sympathetic Port Commission, and won two of three targeted races despite major campaign spending

\$15: The shot heard

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