

Hillsboro School Board opposes minimum wage hike

The Hillsboro School Board on Jan. 12 voted 4-3 to oppose raising Oregon's minimum wage to either \$13.50 or \$15 per hour.

Two initiative petitions to raise the minimum wage are gathering signatures for the November ballot — one to \$13.50 and the other to \$15. And Gov. Kate Brown recently announced her own plan to raise the minimum wage. Her plan will be brought up for debate during the 2016 legislative session that began this month.

Voting in favor of the school board taking the position to oppose the minimum wage increase were board members Glenn Miller, Erik Seligman,

Wayne Clift, and Monte Akers.

Voting against were Lisa Allen, Kim Strelchun and Janeen Sollman. Allen, who is in her first term on the board, was endorsed by the Northwest Oregon Labor Council.

The Portland Tribune reported that school superintendent Mike Scott admonished board members about taking a position on the issue. Scott said 50 percent of the families the school district serves live below the poverty level. Additionally, he said, there are district employees who earn less than \$13.50 an hour.

"I don't know if that's a position a school board should be

taking. There's a sensitivity around it," he said.

On Jan. 26, a group of union members and activists from 15 Now Oregon held a rally and press conference at the school district administration offices prior to a regularly scheduled school board meeting.

"This vote was taken despite the fact that half of the students in the Hillsboro School District live below the poverty line. Forty percent of the district's students are Latino, and 60 percent of Latino workers make less than \$15 per hour," a press release stated. "None of the school board members live in poverty. None are Latino."

... SOU settlement

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\$1 million — BOLI is contacting each worker to secure individual releases of claims so that it can collect and distribute the additional payments. BOLI anticipates that all workers will receive payment by May.

The settlement agreement releases SOU, ACC, Adroit and all other parties from future wage claims, while admitting no wrongdoing or liability on the disputed wages.

In a press statement, SOU said: "Though SOU disagreed with BOLI's conclusion that additional wages were owed on the project, due to the time and cost of litigating the dispute, the SOU administration concluded that it was in the best interest of all involved to mutually resolve the dispute. SOU is looking forward to moving on from the issue and continuing to serve our students and community."

Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian told Oregon Public Broadcasting, "when we do an investigation, we investigate both the government agency

and the contractor to make sure the law is being followed. There's a responsibility of both the contractors and the government body to ensure that workers are being paid the amount of money that they're due."

Avakian said contractors and public agencies will often check with the agency before initiating a project, to see if it falls under the state's prevailing wage laws.

"It's unfortunate that did not happen in this case, which is what led to the investigation and now the settlement," Avakian told OPB. "But, that said, we're very pleased that Southern Ore-

gon has stepped up, is paying the money, and that workers are going to get everything that they and their families earned."

(Editor's Note: The Oregon State Building Trades Council helped pass a bill in the Legislature that makes it clear that state universities are obligated to pay commercial prevailing wages on construction projects on university-owned land — regardless of where the funding comes from to build it.)



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