

State legislator proposes regional minimum wage rates

By **PARIS ACHEN**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Spurred by two ballot initiatives to raise Oregon's minimum wage, a Portland lawmaker plans to propose legislation in February that would set different regional minimum wage rates based on cost of living and median income.

State Sen. Michael Dembrow, who chairs the Senate workforce committee, said a legislative agreement could help avert an acrimonious and prolonged battle over minimum wage at the ballot box.

"Our hope is if we can pass it in February, that the campaigns will stop collecting signatures, and they'll feel comfortable with it," Dembrow said.

Since the end of last session, when proposals to raise the minimum wage failed, a legislative work group has been looking at some of the issues to consider in setting a minimum wage.

"What became clear from that was we needed to do something that is not one-size-fits-all," Dembrow said. "We needed to take into account cost of living and economic vitality in different parts of the state."

Three regional rates

Dembrow said he envisions setting three regional minimum wage rates — with the highest rate in the Portland metro area and the lowest in rural areas.

The rates would be phased in during a three- to four-year period, he said.

"Our goal here is to get the wage where families can make it without relying on public assistance," he said.

Senate workforce committee members have yet to settle on exact numbers but hope to have those details ready in time for a public hearing in January.

The regionally tiered minimum wage would address the need for higher incomes in Portland, where housing costs are skyrocketing, without crippling businesses in slower economic areas such as the southern coast, Dembrow said.

One ballot initiative underway proposes hiking the state's minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2019. Another initiative by a union-led coalition seeks to boost the minimum wage to \$13.50 and give cities the authority to hike wages beyond that.

Dembrow's legislation would not repeal state preemption on wage hikes, which prohibits municipalities from increasing the minimum wage.

Giving cities the authority to independently hike wages can be problematic, Dembrow said.

"If Portland does raise the minimum wage, and Beaverton doesn't, there is a concern a lot of businesses would relocate," Dembrow said. "We have had a lot of experience with the state setting its own minimum wage but haven't had a lot of experience with cities doing it. That is a relatively new phenomenon."

In the past two years, Washington, D.C., Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles have taken action to gradually raise minimum wage to \$15.

Legislation a priority

House and Senate leadership and Gov. Kate Brown have indicated passing minimum wage legislation is a priority for the upcoming session.

Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, said he supports increasing the minimum wage but has yet to decide on a specific amount. He said he also agrees with repealing the preemption on local wage hikes so that cities such as Portland could raise wages beyond the statewide floor.

But passing wage legislation in February will depend on securing support from key business leaders, he said.

If the Legislature fails to reach a consensus, House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, plans to support the Raise the Wage ballot proposal to increase the minimum wage to \$13.50, said House Democrats spokeswoman Lindsey O'Brien.

So far, Portland Democrats have been dominating the discussion about wage increases, said House Minority Leader Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte.

McLane said he has seen none of the proposals but opposes any that take a one-size-fits-all approach to the minimum wage because of the state's geographic and economic diversity.

McLane said he is concerned higher wage mandates might hurt small businesses, especially in rural areas. He said inflation from hiking wages also could price out retirees on a fixed income and dash job opportunities for young, entry-level workers.

"I understand when you are in Portland that the world is different than Prineville, but I certainly hope Gov. Brown and House Speaker Kotek will show concern for all of the Oregonians who don't live in the city of Portland," McLane said.

Rural Democrats have concerns

Several minimum wage proposals stalled last session partly due to competition with paid sick leave legislation and partly due to cautiousness from rural Democrats.

"The economies in the I-5 corridor and along the Columbia River have really come back, and on the coast, the economy has pretty much stayed the same since the '80s and '90s," said Sen. Amie Roblan, D-Coos Bay. "So, it makes it hard seeing one minimum wage work across the state."

Steep increases such as \$15 were "a hard pill to take when you are trying to get the economy moving again," Roblan said.

The Coos Bay senator said many of his constituents are seniors on a fixed income. Even though many of those constituents support some kind of increase, he said he worries that hiking the minimum wage to \$15 could make things like going out to dinner once a week unaffordable.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

Man cuts himself with saw at bank

The Daily Astorian

A 34-year-old man walked into U.S. Bank Thursday morning with a circular saw, plugged it in and intentionally cut himself on the wrist.

The man, who is believed to be suffering from mental health issues, stopped before amputating his hand.

His injuries were not life-threatening and no one else was harmed.

Astoria Police, Astoria Fire Department and Medix Ambulance responded to the incident just after 10 a.m.

The man was sent to a medical facility for treatment, but because of the nature of the incident, his name is not being released. No criminal charges are expected.

When the man cut his wrist, people in the bank immediately went to his aid

and gave him care before responders arrived. Police do not know why he decided to enter the bank.

"Bank personnel and patrons should be commended for immediately providing medical aid to the man while responders were en route," Astoria Deputy Police Chief Eric Halverson said. "We just hope the man receives both the physical and mental help he needs."

State moves to revoke foster care licenses

By **HILLARY BORRUD**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Two programs that care for foster children and troubled teens could lose their state licenses following a recent review, the Oregon Department of Human Services announced Thursday.

The agency is working with the Oregon Department of Justice to draft "intent to revoke" letters to Scotts Valley School, a therapeutic boarding program south of Eugene, and the Youth Villages foster care agency which operates facilities in Lake Oswego and Oregon City. As a result of the review, the state also stopped placing foster children at Youth Villages programs and moved the children who were already there to other placements, Department of Human Services spokesman Gene Evans wrote in an email Thursday.

Top officials at the agency knew there was trouble at Scotts Valley School, because they had flagged it on an internal list of problematic service providers known as the "radar list." Yet the agency had not revoked or even denied the renewal of licenses for any organizations on the list since it was created 36 months ago, according to department testimony at a legislative hearing last month.

Corrective action

The letters are a "due process step" the state must complete before revoking the licenses,

and they will lay out corrective actions Scotts Valley School and Youth Villages must complete in order to continue operating, according to the department. The agency did not release any information Thursday about the type of problems that led officials to start the license revocation process.

Connie Mills, manager of public relations for Youth Villages, said in a statement that the organization takes the state's concerns seriously and is making improvements to the program.

"While we disagree with some of DHS's conclusions, we are extremely concerned about this and are taking

these issues very seriously," Mills wrote. "Our No. 1 goal always is to provide the very best care for young people. DHS has asked us to hold off on admissions to our residential campus program for the time being. They have some questions about this program and we are actively addressing those while we work with DHS on a corrective action plan."

Mills wrote that this will include "enhancing supervision of youth by significantly increasing highly skilled and trained staffing, as well as conducting additional trainings and evaluating other areas in which we can make improvements."

A Life Remembered

Heaven's Honor Roll November of 2015

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2 Eva Esther Petersen.....	92
7 Mark Alan Roberts.....	64
7 Joanne Lowe.....	70
24 Jacqueline Joy Norman.....	80
28 William R "Mitch" Mitchum.....	73
30 Janet Marlene Taylor.....	81

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