

Courts Resolve Wage Complaints

(AP) — Oregon workers are more and more often turning to the federal courts for resolution on wage and overtime complaints.

The number of lawsuits filed this year alleging violations of the Fair Labor Standard Act, the law that regulates pay and overtime, rose to 48, compared to 42 last year, 38 in 2000 and 21 in 1999.

In early December, a Portland jury found Wal-Mart, the world's largest retailer, guilty in a class-action overtime case — the first of a series to be tried nationwide.

And in Multnomah County last year, Taco Bell lost a wage-and-hour case involving overtime, although total damages have not been determined.

Fair Labor Standards Act cases are on the rise nationwide.

In reaction to the rising number of lawsuits, the Bush administration is considering proposals to update the 64-year-old Fair Labor Standards Act to clarify who qualifies for overtime and allow employers to offer more flexible work schedules.

Minimum Wagers Get a Raise



Oregon's lowest earners bring home more each week

PHOTO BY WYNDE DYER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Nikesha James, 18, works at KFC in the St. Johns neighborhood of north Portland. She is one of thousands of minimum wage workers who received a raise of 40 cents an hour on New Year's Day as a result of an Oregon ballot measure narrowly approved in November.

BY WYNDE DYER

THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Thousands of low wage Oregonians received a 40-cent raise to \$6.90 on New Year's Day, giving Oregon the third highest minimum wage rate in the United States. Washington, with a minimum wage of \$7.01 is the

second highest in the country with Alaska in the lead at \$7.15.

"For some people 40 cents more an hour can really help a lot," said Nikesha James, a minimum wage worker at KFC in the St. Johns neighborhood of north Portland.

But some say the increase, narrowly approved by Oregon

voters in November, doesn't go far enough to help the most needy workers.

A full-time minimum wage worker will earn about \$14,300 a year and officials say that is still below the poverty level for families of three or more.

James, 18, a high school senior who plans to go to college at Oklahoma State, plans a career as a pediatrician so she doesn't have to work for minimum wage the rest of her life. Right now, she said, working four days a week at her current pay is fine as she tries to save money for her prom dress and graduation gown. But James doesn't know how some people make a living even at \$6.90 an hour.

"Some people have really big families and

lot's of bills," she said. "It's hard."

The increase may ease the burden on minimum wage earners, but for employers the extra 40 cents may hit hard.

Most food grown in Oregon is picked and packed by laborers earning minimum wage and small farmers, already troubled by a poor economy, expect to have difficulty offsetting costs.

Restaurant owners who typically employ part-time minimum wage earners say patrons can expect to see menu prices raise slightly to compensate for the wage hike.

State officials have said that the minimum wage increase will probably not have much impact on Oregon's staggering unemployment rate.



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Sharpton Makes Run for President

Activist pledges to push issues concerning most Americans

(AP) — The Rev. Al Sharpton announced Friday that he will form a presidential exploratory committee, saying he is probably more qualified than any other Democrat seeking the White House.

"I am running for president to finally put the issues concerning most Americans on to the front burner," the 48-year-old civil rights activist said.

Sharpton expects to file papers with the Federal Elections Committee on Jan. 21, spokeswoman Rachel Noerdlinger said.

"I'm qualified, probably more qualified than any other person who is expected to be on the Democratic ticket for 2004, because I actually have a following and I speak for the people," said Sharpton, who has never held public office.



Rev. Al Sharpton

Preparing for the campaign, Sharpton criss-crossed the country last year giving speeches and wrote a book titled "Al on America" that was released in October. In the book, the black leader said presidential politics has become "an exclusive club for white males, of a certain income, of a certain age."

Sharpton unsuccessfully sought the Democratic nomination for Senate in 1994 and the party's mayoral nomination in 1997.

As head of the civil rights group National Action Network, Sharpton has been considered a polarizing figure by many. But he has moderated his positions in recent years, aligning himself more closely with the party establishment.

Bigotry Tied to GOP Leader

Flap similar to downfall of U.S. Sen. Trent Lott

(AP) — A candidate for the chairman of the California Republican Party circulated an article suggesting the nation would have been better off if the South had won the Civil War, a published report said Saturday.

The Contra Costa Times reported that Bill Back, the current vice chairman of the state GOP, sent the article to party members in 1999 as part of an e-mail newsletter. It was written by Bill Lind of the Center for Cultural Conservatism, a wing of the conservative Free Congress Foundation.

"Given how bad things have gotten in the old USA, it's not hard to believe that history might have taken a better turn," Lind wrote.

"The real damage to race relations in the South came not from slavery, but from Reconstruction, which would not have occurred if the South had won."

Back told the Times he did not agree with the views expressed in the article, saying he found them "incorrect and incomplete." He said the newsletter published different views he didn't always agree with and said he regretted sending the article.

"It was never my intent to hurt or offend people. It was to communicate and get people to think or discuss issues," he said.

The flap comes just weeks after U.S. Senator Trent Lott was forced to step down from his GOP leadership post after commenting the nation wouldn't have had so many problems if Strom Thurmond had triumphed in his 1940s pro-segregation run for president.

The Times said word of the newsletter angered Shannon Reeves, the state's Republican Party secretary and the only black member of its executive committee. Reeves rejected the defense that Back was simply trying to generate discussion.

"There's no room for bigotry in the Republican Party and I don't think there's a lot of room in the Republican Party for people who distribute bigoted information," Reeves said. "I wonder, does the African-American community have any value to the leadership of the party when leaders send out something like this, not considering at all this would be offensive?"



REACH

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Wellness Within REACH: Mind, Body, and Soul Activity Calendar

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Matt Dishman 77 NE Knott					Old School Dance 6:00-7:00pm Kendrick	African Dance 11:00am-12:00pm Addo (Class begins Jan. 11, 2003)
Salvation Army 5325 N Williams.		Water Aerobics 2:00 - 3:00pm Hampton		Water Aerobics 2:00 - 3:00pm Hampton		
Nature's 3535 NE 15th.		Yoga 7:30-8:30 pm O'Rourke				Body Conditioning 9:30-10:30am Nickerson (Class begins Jan. 11, 2003)
Peninsula Park. 700 N Portland		Walking Group 6:00-7:00 pm Nickerson	Aerobics 7:30-8:30pm Keller (Class begins Jan. 15, 2003)			Aerobics 9:00-10:00am Keller (Class begins Jan. 18, 2003) Walking Group 12:30 pm Nickerson
Mallory Avenue Christian Church (Gym) 126 NE Alberta	Aerobics 6:30-7:30pm Nickerson		Aerobics 6:30-7:30pm Nickerson		Aerobics 6:30-7:30pm Nickerson	

**Must be 21 or older to participate. Please check with AAHC before showing up to the first class 503-413-1850. Please receive approval from your doctor before beginning exercise class.
All classes are free of charge!



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