

\$15 min-wage movement sets sights on more states

By JENNIFER PELTZ and DAVID KLEPPER
Associated Press

California and New York — where almost 1 in 5 Americans live — are on their way to raising their minimum wage to \$15 an hour, and the activists who spearheaded those efforts are now setting their sights on other similarly liberal, Democratic-led states.

Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island and Washington are among the states with active “Fight for \$15” efforts, and even economic experts who oppose the increased rate see it gaining momentum.

“There is lots of pressure to do this,” said Douglas Holtz-Eakin, a former Congressional Budget Office director who is now president of the conservative American Action Forum, which says big minimum-wage increases cost jobs.

The idea faces headwinds in more conservative and rural states in the South and the Midwest. But activists believe the movement is picking up steam, even if their two big victories so far were achieved in two highly receptive places: trend-setting, liberal, labor-friendly states with a high cost of living and yawning gaps between rich and poor, especially in New York City and Silicon Valley.

“In the beginning, it looked impossible,” said Alvin Major, a fast-food worker and leader of the Fight for \$15 campaign. But now, “what happened in New York, in California, it’s going to spread around the country.”

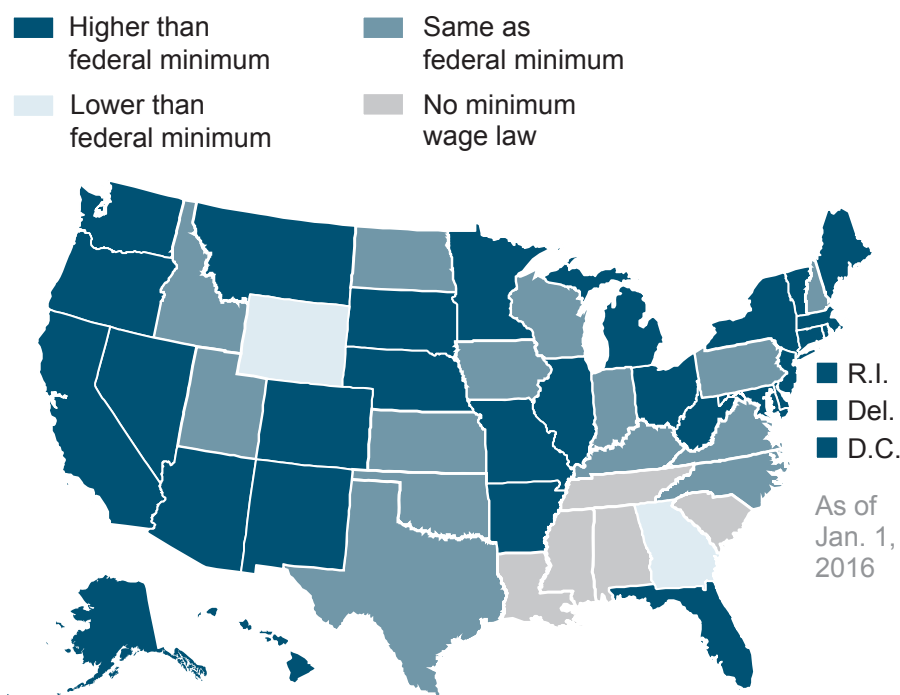
Since the \$15-an-hour movement planted roots with a 2012 New York City fast food workers strike, it has gained ground amid the broader debate over income inequality. Cities such as Seattle, Los Angeles and San Francisco have recently agreed to go to \$15 in the coming years, and Oregon’s minimum wage is headed to \$14.75 in Portland.

Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders has been pushing for a \$15-an-hour standard nationally, while President Barack Obama has called more generally for raising the minimum wage. The federal minimum is currently \$7.25; 29 states and Washington, D.C., have set theirs higher.

New York and California are now on track to have the highest. California Gov. Jerry Brown, a Democrat, is set Monday to sign a measure boosting the current \$10 rate to \$15 by 2022.

State of minimum wage laws

Most states have boosted minimum wage levels above the federal rate, which has been \$7.25 since 2009. For states with lower rates or no rate, the federal minimum applies.



SOURCE: Department of Labor

AP

In New York, Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo and legislative leaders have agreed on a more complex plan. The \$9 minimum would gradually rise to \$15 in New York City by the end of 2018 and then in some prosperous suburbs by the end of 2021, but only to \$12.50 in 2020 in the rest of the state, with further increases to \$15 tied to inflation and other economic indicators. The measure headed to Cuomo’s desk after passing the Legislature on Friday.

New York’s graduated approach stemmed from negotiations with Republicans who worried such a sharp increase would devastate businesses, particularly in the more fragile economy outside the New York metropolitan area.

Similar dynamics may play out in other parts of the country. While \$15 may seem reasonable in high-paying areas, “it’s a much harder lift in low-wage areas,” said Jared Bernstein, senior fellow at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and former adviser to Vice President Joe Biden.

Also, California and New York have politically influential unions, strong community organizing activity and Democratic politicians eager to translate the movement into legislation.

“That’s not going to happen in some states, particularly in the South and maybe some

of the Midwest,” said Peter Dreier, a politics professor at Occidental College.

Idaho lawmakers, for example, recently passed a measure barring local governments from raising the statewide minimum of \$7.25, and Republicans in Arizona are trying to do the same.

The income gap has been widening in every state for at least 30 years but is particularly pronounced in states with large financial or information technology industries, according to economists Mark Price of the Keystone Research Center and Estelle Sommeiller of the Institute for Research in Economics and Social Sciences in France.

The top 1 percent of New York taxpayers, for instance, earned 40 times the average income of the state’s remaining 99 percent in 2011, according to research from University of California at Berkeley economist Emmanuel Saez. Nationally, the top 1 percent made 24 times that of everyone else; in California, the top earned 26 times more.

Economists have long debated the impact of raising the minimum wage, and some recent research has found that modest increases seldom cost many jobs. But the jumps to \$15 are larger than those economists have tested in the past, and there are fears of widespread job losses in some places.

In New York City, Joseph

Sferrazza worries that paying \$15 will cost him his bakery, La Bella Ferrera. The rate is nearly double what he now pays his employees, mostly students working part time.

“The rent is so high, the profit margin is already so low, I don’t see how we can make it work,” he said. “You can only charge so much for a cookie.”

But \$15 an hour would be a 50 percent raise for Maria Velez, 29, who makes \$10 an hour working at a children’s program and helps support her parents and grandparents.

“This city is crazy expensive and only getting worse,” she said. If the boost took effect immediately, “it would make my life and my family’s life better — but in five years? I can’t say.”

BRIEFLY

Sarah Short receives insurance license

PENDLETON — Sarah Short recently obtained her property and casualty insurance license.

She has been working for Terry Becktold at Farmers Insurance in Pendleton for the last seven months as an administrative assistant. Now that she has her license, she is being promoted to a producer for Farmers Insurance.

Short initially gained some of her insurance experience by working at the hospital in Baker City. She is married, has two children and lives in Pendleton.

The office is located at 509 S.W. Frazer Ave., Pendleton, and the phone number is 541-278-4963.



Short

Symposium offers business tips

PENDLETON — Information on how to cultivate repeat customers, use social media effectively in business and other business tools are featured in the Spring Symposium.

Sponsored by the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce, the event is Tuesday from noon to 5 p.m. at the Red Lion, 304 S.E. Nye Ave., Pendleton.

The event, which includes lunch, costs \$60 for chamber members and \$70 for non-members. Also, people are invited to bring a guest, as it’s two-for-one registration.

For more information or to register, call 541-276-7411.

PGE official to update chamber

HEPPNER — Wendy Veliz, who works with public policy and governmental affairs with Portland General Electric, will provide an update at Heppner’s April chamber of commerce meeting.

The no-host luncheon is Thursday at noon at Heppner City Hall, 111 N. Main St. The meal is \$10 per person. In addition, there will be a brief all entities report.

To ensure there’s enough food, those planning to attend must RSVP by calling 541-676-5536 by Tuesday morning.

Latino Business Network meets April 12

HERMISTON — The Hermiston Chamber of Commerce works to promote, educate and support Latino businesses and organizations in the greater Hermiston area through networking, advocacy and business community partnerships.

Latino Business Network meetings are scheduled for the second Tuesday of each month at 10 a.m. at the Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395. Everyone is welcome to attend. The upcoming meeting is April 12.

For more information, contact Debbie Pedro at 541-567-6151 or debbie@hermistonchamber.com.

United Way seeks tournament sponsors

The United Way of Umatilla & Morrow Counties is seeking sponsors for its annual charity golf tournament.

For the past eight years, the local United Way has hosted the tournament to help raise funds for the its partner agencies. This year’s event is Friday, July 29 at Wildhorse Resort Golf Course.

Different levels of sponsorship are available, which includes corresponding levels of recognition.

All money donated to the local United Way stays in the area. In addition, as a nonprofit organization, all donations are tax-deductible.

For more information, contact Cricket Nicholson at 541-276-2661 or unitedwayumco@eoni.com.

for providing the funds to update the audio/visual equipment at the Pendleton Convention Center

Learn more about the Pendleton Foundation at:
www.pendletonfoundationtrust.com

The Forest Plan and You

4.9 million acres of public land in Eastern Oregon are operating under plans and science that date back to 1990. Oregon Public Broadcasting will sit down with Malheur National Forest Supervisor Steve Beverlin and representatives from environmentalist, recreation, tribal and timber interests to talk about conflicts of interest and the path forward.

This conversation is brought to you by Oregon Public Broadcasting and the East Oregonian

OPB EAST OREGONIAN

Wednesday, April 6
6:30-8p.m.
 (Arrive before 6:30p.m. for seating, forum will begin at 7p.m.)

Blue Mountain Community College
 ST-200 Lecture Hall

The forum will be broadcast on **Think Out Loud** on Thursday at noon and 8p.m.

UMATILLA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE ANNUAL MEETING & MEMBERSHIP DINNER

Saturday, April 16, 2016
Hermiston Conference Center
5 p.m. - 7 p.m.

Our Annual Meeting theme
“Building For The Future” is a recognition of the milestone projects underway or completed in 2015, and what we expect in 2016.
 As always, attendance is free to UEC members.
 We hope you will join us!

Featured Speaker
Mark Speckman, celebrated football coach and inspirational speaker, will highlight Umatilla Electric’s 2016 Annual Meeting!