

Three-tier minimum wage plan set for Senate vote

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau

SALEM — A bill to set three different minimum wage rates in the state is headed to the Oregon Senate floor this week.

The bill would hike wages to \$14.75 in the Portland metro area, \$12.50 in rural and coastal areas with struggling economies and \$13.50 in the rest of the state by 2022. The rates are based on median income and cost of living in those regions and what it takes to be “self-sufficient” — to pay basic expenses such as food, housing and transportation, said Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, chairman of the Senate Workforce and General Government Committee.

The committee passed the proposal Friday 3-to-2. “Passing minimum wage is



Paris Achen/Pamplin Media Group

A three-tiered minimum wage plan sponsored by Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, chairman of the Senate Workforce and General Government Committee, will get a vote by the full Senate.

not going to be a silver bullet for problems faced by low-income Oregonians,” Dembrow said.

Dembrow said lawmakers

still need to increase the earned income tax credit, address the cost of child care and find ways to increase affordable housing in the state,

where prices, particularly in the Portland area, have skyrocketed.

The vote fell along party lines with the committee’s two Republicans, Sens. Tim Knopp of Bend and Kim Thatcher of Keizer, voting no.

“I really feel the impact of this is going to be negative in many ways,” Knopp said. “I think it is going to hurt the people you’re trying to help.”

He said small businesses would take an economic hit and employees would lose jobs.

The Republicans said they plan to write a minority report and offer an amendment to the bill on the Senate floor. The bill could reach the Senate floor as early as Tuesday, Dembrow said.

Dembrow authored the bill after months of meeting with stakeholders and consulting

research on self-sufficiency thresholds for every county in the state, he said. The bill was intended to offer an alternative to ballot initiatives that would raise the minimum to \$15 or \$13.50 statewide and would repeal a ban on municipalities and counties from setting a higher wage.

The first pay bump would start in July, increasing the wage from \$9.25 to \$9.75 statewide.

The minimum gradually will climb to \$14.75 in 2022 in the Portland urban growth boundary, which includes parts of Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties. It will rise to \$13.50 in Benton, Clatsop, Columbia, Deschutes, Hood River, Jackson, Josephine, Lane, Lincoln, Linn, Marion, Polk, Tillamook, Wasco, and Yamhill counties, and parts of Multnomah, Clack-

amas and Washington counties outside Portland’s urban growth boundary.

In rural areas, the minimum will increase to \$12.50. Those areas include Malheur, Lake, Harney, Wheeler, Sherman, Gilliam, Wallowa, Grant, Jefferson, Baker, Union, Crook, Klamath, Douglas, Coos, Curry, Umatilla and Morrow counties.

The Legislative Fiscal Office determined that the cost of raising minimum wage for the state and local governments is indeterminate because it’s impossible to know how many positions will be affected by the time the increases take effect in the next seven years.

Dembrow’s amendment, first offered Wednesday, nudged out a proposal by Gov. Kate Brown that would have set two minimum wage rates in the state.

Senators introduce wildfire funding amendment

Plan frees funds for prevention, management

By George Plaven
EO Media Group

Oregon Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden is once again working with Idaho Republican Mike Crapo on legislation to fix wildfire funding.

Wyden and Crapo introduced an amendment to the U.S. Senate’s proposed energy bill on Feb. 2 that would end “fire-borrowing,” where land management agencies shift money from other programs to cover the cost of fighting large wildfires.

Wyden described fire-borrowing as “budgetary quicksand” that drags down every program at the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. The amendment would establish a new Wildfire Disaster Relief Fund — which is similar to how the federal government

pays for other natural disasters.

A summary of the amendment says it will free up roughly \$300 million in funding for active land management and fire prevention.

“We know that disaster-scale wildfires are going to continue to be a threat,” Crapo said. “We can better prepare for the increasing costs of wildland fire suppression by providing land managers and firefighters the certainty needed to plan and allocate resources properly without robbing from other priorities during each fire season.”

Congress passed a spending bill in December that increased fire funding for one year, but the senators said this amendment will provide a long-term solution. The legislation has support from 21 co-sponsors in the Senate, 145 co-sponsors in the House and more than 250 groups representing hunters, anglers, timber companies and conservationists.

The amendment also in-

cludes several provisions for forest management, including measures to fast-track thinning projects recommended by a collaborative working group. Collaboratives must include scientists, conservationists and land managers, as well as local governments, tribes and industry.

Projects would still need to comply with local forest plans

and federal laws, but could move forward more quickly if they meet certain criteria.

Finally, the amendment includes several environmental provisions such as permanently authorizing the Forest Service Legacy Roads and Trails Sedimentation Program, which lets the agency decommission roads and replace other unnatural fish barriers.

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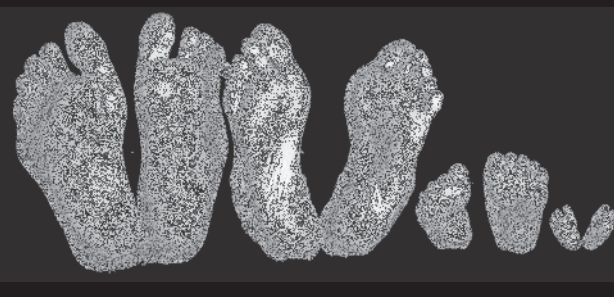
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