

Minimum wage bill headed to House floor

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau

SALEM — A controversial proposal to set three regional minimum wage rates in Oregon is headed for a vote by the House of Representatives.

After holding a three-hour public hearing, the House Business and Labor Committee voted 6-to-5 Monday to recommend passage of the bill. The vote was along party lines, and Republicans said they plan to offer a minority report and alternative to the proposal on the House floor.

The vote could come as early as Thursday.

"I think what you have before you in this particular legislation is a policy decision and that is whether we expect that Oregonians who are working full time should be living in poverty," Gov. Kate Brown told lawmakers Monday. "The answer for me is no."

The Senate approved the measure 16-to-12 Thursday, also largely along party lines.

The bill hikes wages

from \$9.25 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 pay basic expenses such as food, housing and transportation, said Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, who proposed the measure.

The proposal hikes wages beginning in July from \$9.25 to \$9.75 statewide.

The minimum gradually would 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, Clackamas and Washington counties outside Portland's urban growth boundary.

Sex workers, advocates oppose bill aimed at sex trafficking

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Sex workers and their advocates are speaking out against a bill on the fast track for passage in the Oregon Legislature that would criminalize receiving goods or services for promoting prostitution.

The bill is designed to allow district attorneys to prosecute human trafficking cases when traffickers receive goods, services or something else of value in exchange for the sexual contact with victims. Under existing law, traffickers commit a crime of promoting prostitution only when they accept monetary compensation for facilitating sexual contact with a victim.

"Many traffickers and exploiters understand the law and have changed their tactics to take advantage of this oversight," said J.R. Ujifusa, a Multnomah County deputy district attorney.

The bill would close that loophole, Ujifusa said.

Matilda Bickers, a strip club dancer and founder of the Portland chapter of Sex Workers Outreach Project, said the proposed provision makes no distinction between sex traffickers and pimps or client screening services that receive compensation in a consensual business relationships with sex workers.

"Unfortunately, there are actually systems in place which would be defined as pimping in this bill, which are actually ways that sex workers use to stay safe," Bickers said.

Bickers gained publicity last year for suing Casa Diablo Vegan Strip Club in Northwest Portland for wage theft and harassment.

The bill passed the House unanimously Feb. 4. The Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously voted Monday to recommend the bill for consideration by the Senate.



Capital Bureau/Paris Achen

Sex worker advocates, left to right, Matilda Bickers of the Portland chapter of the Sex Workers Outreach Project and Michelle Schilz of the Sex Workers Outreach Coalition, discuss their testimony in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

House doubles renewable mandate, nixes coal

By Hillary Borrud
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Lawmakers in the Oregon House voted 39-20 Monday to pass a bill that would double the state's renewable energy mandate and eliminate coal from the state's power mix.

The bill heads next to the state Senate, where lawmakers could make changes in committee before it comes up for a vote.

Critics have raised concerns the bill will cost Oregonians more than utilities have projected, yet do little to reduce the state's carbon emissions compared to the status quo. Supporters said the bill could create renewable energy construc-

tion and maintenance jobs and is critical for Oregon to meet its greenhouse gas reduction goals.

Republicans cast all of the "no" votes on Monday, but a handful of Republicans — Rep. Knute Buehler, R-Bend, Rep. Mark Johnson, R-Hood River, Rep. Wayne Krieger, R-Gold Beach, Rep. Vic Gilliam, R-Silverton and Rep. John Huffman, R-The Dalles — voted for the measure. State Rep. Brent Barton, D-Oregon City, was excused from the House vote on Monday.

Buehler said he would vote for the bill based on information he received that showed it would have a minimal impact on Oregonian's power bills, but "a big impact" on reducing pollution.

"I've been assured after looking at a variety of data from many sources that the impact on rates will be small," Buehler said.

PacificCorp and Portland General Electric, the state's largest utilities, released analyses in January that showed House Bill 4036 would increase the cost of power to customers by roughly 1 percent annually in the lead-up to full implementation. PacifiCorp's analysis showed the bill would reduce Oregon's carbon emissions through 2040 by 35 million tons. That is approximately 58 percent of the total greenhouse gases Oregon emits in one year, according to data from the state Department of Environmental Quality.



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