



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

House Committee on Business and Labor
RE: Minimum Wage in Oregon

Chair Holvey, Vice Chairs Barton & Kennemer, and members of the Committee, for the record my name is Rob Nosse. I'm the State Representative for House District 42, inner SE & NE Portland.

I'm here today because working Oregonians, many working full time, are not making enough to provide for themselves and their families. Over 400,000 Oregonians are struggling to survive and support their families in low wage jobs. Minimum wage workers, if they work full time, only make \$19,240. More than half of all minimum wage workers are women.

According to the US Department of Agriculture, we have one of the highest rates of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) commonly called food stamps participation in the United States. In 2013, approximately 1 in 5 Oregonians received food stamp benefits monthly. At the beginning of 2014, approx. 197,000 SNAP enrollees had worked the previous year. These working Oregonians urgently need a raise.

Let me also take a moment to dispel a few myths about minimum wage workers in our state. First, I've heard it said that people working in these jobs are in their teens & early 20s, just starting out in the workforce.

I have also heard people say that those who are working minimum wage jobs are just starting out their careers and don't have major responsibilities or dependents. This is also not the case. Again the average age of a minimum wage worker is 35. Census data shows that, in 2010-12, over half of all low wage households were female-headed households with children. 1 in 3 of these households is below the actual federal poverty line.

I've even heard some opponents say that minimum wage jobs are simple, easy jobs, the kind people have before taking on something more complex and more lucrative. According to the Oregon Employment Department, over 80% of low wage jobs are clustered in just 23 occupations. Sales and retail, food preparation and food service, child care workers, janitors, groundskeepers, home health aides, preschool teachers, and automotive attendants, among others. I can't imagine anyone thinking these jobs are simple, easy or unimportant.

Interestingly enough, many of these industries are also extremely profitable. Accommodation & food services, retail trade and health care & social assistance, the 3 industries employing the most SNAP recipients, each made over a billion dollars in corporate profits in Oregon in 2012. Raising this wage is vital. Nationally, from 2009 to 2012, the top 1 percent of incomes earners, captured 95 percent of income gains over that time period.

Meanwhile, personal income tax data from our Department of Revenue shows that the bottom 75% of income earners saw a decrease in their real income between 2002 and 2012. Data from the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics' also backs that data up and shows that real wages for most workers in Oregon have declined over the past decade. Now I've signed onto to several bills regarding the minimum wage. I won't pretend that I know best way to raise it. I just know that it must be raised, and I look forward to having this conversation with all of you so that we can find the best bill and the best way forward

Mr. Chair, members of the committee I would like to close with two final thoughts. I know this issue is controversial. But I believe we all care about the working people in our districts, regardless of our party or our occupation or background. I also believe that we all feel that all work and all workers should have dignity.

By dignity I mean that a person's work is worthwhile no matter what that work or profession or occupation and that it should pay enough to provide for that worker and his or her family. The need for the innate dignity of workers and their work, I believe, speaks to our collective sense of civic responsibility, our sense of fair play and for many of us our personal faith.

Sincerely,

Representative Rob Nosse
House District 42, SE Portland

