

The Economic and Moral Imperative of Raising Oregon's Minimum Wage to at least \$15

We Oregonians share a value that is grounded in the importance of community, caring about each other and caring about future generations. We respect the dignity of work and believe that people who work hard should not live in poverty. We expect our elected representatives to enact policies that represent our values. I thank Diane Rosenbaum and others who have helped our communities by championing increases in the minimum wage in years past. I thank Rob Nosse and others who are now sponsoring the current, very critical minimum wage bills. I urge my representative Bill Kennemer and Clackamas County representatives Brent Barton and Shemia Fagan to support raising the minimum wage. I strongly urge everyone on the Business and Labor committee to support raising the minimum wage to at least \$15 and to call for a House Vote. You have a pivotal role to play in leading Oregon and indeed the nation on this important issue.

My family and I live in a comfortable home in Clackamas County and have a decent household income but we are very concerned with the struggles faced by low wage workers in our community and the growing inequality that is plaguing our society. Every day we interact with people who are not making enough money to make ends meet. The bus driver who takes our kids to school, the woman who serves them lunch at school, the cheerful lady who brews coffee at the local café, the petrol pump attendant who fills my tank, the car park attendant in the garage where I park for downtown meetings, the office cleaners who come in the night to clean the offices where I work, the shop clerks where I do my shopping on the way home from work, the jovial janitor who is working late so the kids can play basketball at the school gym, the farm workers who produce the food my family eats at dinner, the workers who diligently clean the hospitals we rely on when we are sick, the home care and assisted living workers who tend to the aged and infirm, the restaurant staff that cater to us whenever we go out to dine. I value the work that ALL these people do and I believe that they deserve a decent living wage. They are our neighbors, our friends, many of them are the working parents of kids in our community and they deserve a raise in the minimum wage. I urge you to examine your own daily interactions and see the value that these workers bring to our communities. Don't be surprised though if the same person who flips your burger at lunchtime is also stocking the shelves by night at your local supermarket because working multiple jobs to make ends meet is the reality for many low wage workers in our society right now.

Panning out from the micro level of my daily life to a macroeconomic perspective I see strong economic reasons to immediately raise the minimum wage

- Our economy would really benefit from the positive stimulus that an increase in the paychecks of low wage workers would bring. Putting extra dollars in the pockets of hundreds of thousands of low wage workers who will spend it locally will have a serious multiplier effect on our economy and will create more jobs.
- Our state currently pays out \$1.7 B in public assistance and much of that money is in fact an indirect subsidy to highly profitable low wage employers including “America’s Biggest Welfare Queens” - Walmart and McDonalds.
- Small business owners that I have talked with share my basic Oregon Values and favor raising the minimum wage. Many of them already pay their workers more than the minimum wage because they recognize it makes good business sense. When workers are respected and paid a decent wage they are happier in their jobs reducing turnover and increasing productivity.
- Speaking of Productivity gains – it should be noted that raising the min wage to \$15 does not even “Restore” it to the level it should be, given productivity gains over the years and inflation. Extrapolating out from 1968 with those two factors in mind, the minimum wage should be in excess of \$20. Let’s stop the regression where so much of our economic growth is benefitting very few in our society. Workers should be sharing in productivity gains and addressing the plight of low wage workers is a critically important step to reverse this dangerous regression.

The growing income inequality in our society should to be tackled on many fronts with all the tools policy makers have at their disposal including Taxation Code, Resource Allocations Decisions in the State Budget, Economic Development incentives that create Good Jobs with organizations that Prioritize People over Profit, Innovative ideas such as Public Banking should be explored and implemented AND we should immediately RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE TO AT LEAST \$15

It’s time for the Oregon Legislature to be bold, be progressive and lead the nation on this important issue. I urge the Committee on Business and Labor do the right thing by supporting the proposed increase in the minimum wage. Hundreds of thousands of low wage workers are relying on you and the entire population of Oregon will benefit if you take this step to strengthen the fabric of our society and reassert Oregon values.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my testimony.

Siobhan Gwozdz, Oregon City