

April 14, 2015

Re: Minimum Wage Bills

Representative Cliff Bentz:

I am a resident of Burns, Oregon and a concerned constituent in your district. I am currently following the minimum wage bills and strongly oppose any increase to Oregon's minimum wage. I realize you are not a committee member, but I wanted to speak out anyway and share my support of your NO vote on any of the related bills. I am actually a recent Eastern Oregonian of a mere seven years (I think it takes seven generations to be considered truly from the East Side!) I grew up on a farm in Amity (Yamhill County), where my family continues to reside and farm, and where my experience with minimum wage issues comes from. For several years, after graduating from Oregon State University and dabbling in the banking industry, I was an office and production manager for our family farm and one of the largest blueberry processing plants in Oregon.

The minimum wage is just that, a minimum, a starting point. This is the rate we pay entry-level workers, those with little or no experience, who have fewer responsibilities, and are easier to replace. This is for the teenager or any first-time worker who is just building a resume. People keep throwing around the term "livable wage;" the minimum wage is not intended to be a living wage or one that supports a family. An inexperienced person in the workforce may need to work more than one job to earn a livable wage. If the minimum wage is a livable wage, where is the incentive to earn more by working harder, learning more, gaining responsibility, being loyal, etc.? Any successful business will reward said employee with a pay increase. If not, the employee will find work elsewhere. By increasing this mandatory base pay, we are basically breeding mediocrity, rewarding people for doing nothing but showing up. Even more frustrating is that the experienced, hard-working, loyal employees are really the ones suffering. The more Oregon raises this minimum wage, the less employers are financially able to reward valuable employees at a decent margin above the minimum.

I would be remiss not to mention mechanization. This is a reality, people can and will be replaced with machines. However, this is not ideal, this is not what business owners want. In the blueberry industry it is cheaper to harvest the plants with machines, sort them by shape, color, and size with machines, weigh, package, and label them with machines, but nothing compares to the meticulous human eye and ability to reason. My point is that businesses want to hire people, but legislation is making it harder to justify hiring people over making a one-time purchase of high-tech equipment.

Finally, to quantify the negative impact of increasing the State's minimum wage, I once again draw on my experience with blueberries. Our customers, domestic and international, purchase this commodity out of several states. Michigan might be considered the biggest competitor to Oregon processors. While I believe about 40% of states in the U.S. maintain the Federal Minimum Wage, Michigan does not and is

currently at \$8.15, set to increase to \$9.25 (Oregon's current) by 2018. Our State's minimum wage bills would further widen this gap, putting Oregon at an even greater competitive disadvantage. This essentially punishes Oregon's businesses and ultimately announces to the nation that this state is not business-friendly.

As you can tell, I am passionate about this subject and my experience happens to come from the agriculture industry; however this problem reaches across and affects every industry. Let's keep the American Dream alive and allow people to earn a life they strive for.

Thank you for your time,

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