Bill would have tied pay to Cost of Living Index

SANTA FE – The heavily-discussed House Bill 31 encountered a stumbling block in the Senate Corporations and Transportation Committee during the first session of the 54th New Mexico State Legislature.

During the March 5 session, the committee was unable to attain enough votes to advance HB 31.

HB 31 called for a minimum wage increase across New Mexico in phases. If passed into law, it would call for a minimum wage rate of $10 an hour, which would increase after July 2020 to $11 an hour, and then again after July 2021 to a minimum of $12 an hour.

In addition, HB 31 would eliminate the tip exceptions for employees like restaurant servers, effectively cutting their hourly earnings in half.

Local business owners and elected officials around Gallup, including Rocket Cafe owner Marie Chioda and McKinley County Commission Chairman Bill Lee, spoke out against HB 31, saying it would be devastating for Gallup employees on minimum wage, because of the fluctuating Cost of Living Index and their dependence on tips.

The committee did vote to advance Senate Bill 437, sponsored by Sen. Clemente Sanchez, D-Grants, further in the Senate.

SB 437 calls for a minimum wage increase to $9.50 an hour by April 2020, and then up to $10 an hour by the end of 2020. However, it does not take the Cost of Living Index into account and would not remove the tipped wage exceptions for employees.

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