



Dems aim for statewide minimum wage increase

As Democrats gear up for a legislative session after retaking the state House of Representatives and expanding their majority in the state Senate, several members are looking at ways to increase New Mexico's minimum wage.

Two lawmakers have already pre-filed legislation to do so ahead of the session, which begins Jan. 17.

One measure would double New Mexico's minimum wage from \$7.50 an hour to \$15 an hour by January 2018. Another more cautious bill ups the minimum wage to \$8.45 an hour. Both measures include yearly cost-of-living adjustment increases to kick in after the increases.

Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero, D-Albuquerque, is carrying the more aggressive \$15 per-hour bill.

"Anything lower than that at this point is an insult to the working poor," Roybal Caballero said in an interview. "The poor can't continue to wait. Creditors don't wait, landlords don't wait, inflation doesn't wait."

Sen. William Soules, D-Las Cruces, who didn't return phone calls or emails sent Tuesday seeking comment on this story, is also placing a measure in his bill that would allow businesses

of 10 or less employees to pay \$7.50 an hour. Employers would also be allowed to pay trainees \$7.50 per hour.

Roybal Caballero's bill, on the other hand, mimics the higher \$15 "living wage" set in cities like Seattle and the states of New York and California. Pushes for a \$15 minimum wage largely originated from fast food workers across the country in 2012 and 2013.

Attempts to raise the minimum wage on the state level haven't been successful since the last increase in 2009.

Democrats fell flat the last time they pushed for an increase while holding control of both legislative chambers. That came in 2014, when a proposed constitutional amendment to raise the minimum wage yearly through Consumer Price Index adjustments cleared the Senate but went down in the Democratic-controlled House.

Gov. Susana Martinez, a Republican, has given mixed messages on minimum wage increases in the past.

In 2013, she vetoed a bill that would have raised the state minimum wage to \$8.50 and instead said she would only accept up to \$7.80. The following year, after the legislative session ended, Martinez said she would have supported a failed bill to raise the minimum wage to \$8 without automatic cost-of-living adjustment increases attached to it.

In 2015, legislative Republicans, then in control of the House, tacked a minimum wage increase to \$8 onto a controversial bill that would have barred mandatory union agency fees to employees as a condition of work. Martinez supported the "right to work" bill, which died that year in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

It's unclear what, if any, type of minimum wage increase Martinez will be willing to sign this year. Her office didn't respond to phone calls or emails seeking comment Tuesday for this story.

2017 Legislative Session

Written by By Joey Peters NM Political Report
Friday, 06 January 2017 12:44

In 2016, some Republicans sought to pass a bill that would bar local governments from changing some employment laws, including raising the minimum wage. The bill passed one House committee, then passed another without the block on increasing minimum wage.

That version of the bill never made it to the floor of the House.

Other ideas are likely being discussed in legislative circles.

In an interview conducted in mid-November, Rep. Miguel Garcia, D-Albuquerque, said he intended to file a bill this year that would incrementally increase the minimum wage for two years.

Under Garcia's plan, the wage would increase to \$8.40 by mid-2017, then again to \$9.20 in 2018. Once 2019 rolls around, the state's minimum wage would kick up to \$10.10 and then increase every year after that under the Consumer Price Index, but by no more than 4 percent.

Garcia said he came up with this plan after talking to "small business folks" over the years. He maintained that his proposed cap on yearly Consumer Price Index adjustments would appeal to the business community.

"It won't give small businesses heartburn because they can deal with that," Garcia said. "It's time shortened. Then they can adjust budgets and prepare for it."

Santa Fe, Albuquerque and Las Cruces have higher minimum wages on the city level. They are \$10.91, \$7.75 and \$8.40 per hour respectively. Santa Fe and Bernalillo counties also have minimum wages higher than the state's.

Visit: nmpoliticalreport.com

2017 Legislative Session

Written by By Joey Peters NM Political Report
Friday, 06 January 2017 12:44

By Joey Peters
NM Political Report