



SERVICE EMPLOYEES
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April 13, 2015

To: Senate Workforce and House Business and Labor Committees
From: Rob Sisk, President, SEIU 503, OPEU
Re: Support of SB 610 and HB 2009

Dear Chairs Dembrow and Committee Members:

I am Rob Sisk, President of SEIU 503, OPEU. SEIU 503 represents over 55,000 workers throughout Oregon across a variety of sectors, including state government, higher education, local governments, non-profits, nursing homes, as well as care providers. About half the workers SEIU 503 represents make wages that do not give them the security to adequately provide for their households with a path to get ahead, and we also are here supporting a minimum wage increase to stand up for all workers.

Therefore, we adamantly support raising the minimum wage and the \$15Now Campaign as essential to lifting up workers from the bottom, giving them the dignity and respect for the work they do, and also creating a robust economy that works for all. No worker living in Oregon and their families should live in poverty and without hope of escaping it. That makes this not only an economic and sociological issue, but a moral imperative as well.

That is why SEIU 503 is joined in partnership on this issue with faith, labor and community allies as well as a majority of Oregonians to support a minimum wage increase.

Without dispute, workers who make substandard wages – about 400,000 workers or 25% of our workforce – can't adequately care for themselves or their families. Corporations paying these low wages – many out of state – are left off the hook for providing for their workers despite huge profits they reap on the backs of these workers. Many of their employees are forced to rely on public assistance to survive, putting an incredible strain on tax payers and public budgets. A full-time minimum wage worker falls below the Federal Poverty Level for a family of three, making \$19,240 per year.

Research done by the Economic Policy Institute shows nationally 88% of low wage workers are over 20-years-old, over 35% are at least 40, 56% are women and 28% have children. Nearly a half million four and two-year college graduates (many with suffocating student loan debt) have settled for low wage jobs because there are no higher paying jobs for them.

The collateral damage of low wages is:

- Hundreds of thousands of low wages workers who can't participate as consumers in their own economy, thereby bogging down the potential growth of local and state economies;
- Workers toiling at multiple jobs – sometime both parents – simply so families can survive;
- Parents who have minimal time with their children – often leaving children on their own – increasing domestic stress and trauma;
- Unhealthy communities underfunded on vital services when low wage workers draw from the revenue stream via public assistance instead of paying taxes;

The indirect benefits of increasing wages are:

- Community businesses that thrive because workers have more spending power;
- Healthier families when parents make enough to so they can spend more time with their children and schooling;
- More involvement in community affairs and activities when workers are freed from overwhelming work schedules of long hours and multiple jobs;
- All wages rise, everyone shares more and more fully in the wealth generated by national, state and local economies which are nurtured with more consumers, and in turn create more jobs in a upward spiral of progress; not a plummet to the bottom.

You will hear a lot from opposition over the coming day, but much of the claims are not true. For instance, in Seattle the claim from opposition that numerous restaurants had closed due to higher wages was recently debunked in several news articles. They had in fact, closed due to the natural causes so many restaurants succumb to. Nationally, about 50,000 restaurants close each year.

We also have heard the fear mongering of the \$8-\$10 burger if the wages of fast food workers are raised. In Denmark, McDonald's workers make twice as much as in the United States, have paid sick leave, and a burger costs 35 cents more than it does here.

With overwhelming support coming from faith, labor, and community groups as well as broad support from Oregonians, we will continue to work towards a higher wage until we are successful. Fellow Oregonians can't continue to go to work every day and have their families be living in poverty.

Sincerely,

Rob Sisk, President, SEIU 503, OPEU