From: **Tillamook County Pioneer** donotreply@wordpress.com
Subject: [New post] $15 Minimum Wage
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To: tbender@nehalemtel.net

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New post on **Tillamook County Pioneer**

$15 Minimum Wage

by Editor

Editor's Note: This is a conversation that started on a local Facebook page - North County News, prompted by a post by Tom Bender. He then posted this summary on the local listserv - North Coast BBQ, and gave the Pioneer permission to include on the Tillamook County Pioneer to continue the conversation in the wider community.

Wow! I've been inundated with wonderful heart-felt comments with different perspectives on $15 minimum wages for our communities. It's amazing - when we put our "truths", our experiences, together, we come up with deeper truths and more understanding!

So here's the perspective I'm hearing/feeling currently about $15 wages:

- Inadequate minimum wages is NOT a *local* issue. It is everywhere, but local action can happen.
- Unchanged federal minimum wages since 1968 have meant a considerable *decrease* in actual income once inflation is factored in.
- Most local vacation rental agencies HAVE been paying $15/hr - not just Vacasa. There are two different categories - employees and "independent contractors".
- There ARE significant employer costs for employees beyond the "wage". (One reason why I never expanded my business beyond just myself. I didn't want to become a "manager".)
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that employee compensation averaged $35.28 per hour worked in March 2017. Wages and salaries averaged $24.10 per hour worked (68.3 percent of these costs) while benefits averaged $11.18 and accounted for the remaining 31.7 percent.
- There also seems to be considerable variability in "equivalent" situations: employees at one local grocery receive $12/hr. plus health insurance; at another, experienced employees only get $10+/hr. and no benefits.
- Health insurance is the largest "benefit" that employees often get and independent contractors don't. My personal feeling is to keep that out of the minimum wage discussion, and pray that California's new single-payer-for-all health insurance becomes the standard here and elsewhere.

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- Whether tips should be counted in wages is often a question. Most cities that have been mandating higher wages continue to keep them separate.
- Affordable housing is a related, but separate issue. Living wages are needed, *and* affordable housing is needed.
- Yes, there are different jobs that have different degrees of physical and emotional effort required. Those harder ones should probably deserve more pay, but I feel ALL should have a reasonable minimum "living" wage. One woman earning $16.83/hr after 20 years as a special needs teacher felt she should be paid more than easier jobs. I agree, but feel the bottom line needs to be raised, and her wage bumped up also (but not mandated). Some people complain that, "Higher wages mean fewer jobs." *YES, that is the intention!* ONE job at a living wage rather than two jobs at slavery wages. The reality is that where minimum wages have been increased there has been little loss of actual jobs.
- Some people fear that a 50% increase in wages would mean a 50% increase in prices. The result when Seattle raised its minimum wage was very little impact on prices. Wages are only one component of prices, and with larger businesses particularly, there has been a healthy enough profit margin that wage increases can be accommodated.
- Employer attitudes, management skills, and being a "good" place to work" are also elements of a healthy working environment. Some people have said, "You get what you pay for." Does that mean that employers should pay more??? I know that when we did the Bank of Astoria, we discovered that reduced employee turnover from having a satisfying place to work far more than paid the cost! What are the problems that prevent owners from paying living wages?
- Some people have said, "It's a free market, none of our business." But it's NOT a "free market" when the relative power of employers vs. potential employees is heavily skewed, as with fast food franchises or other "big businesses" that set the framework for all of our local economies.

So . . . I'm feeling that the dominance of the tourism and retirement sectors of our local economy are high enough income that we should both be able and have a moral imperative to raise minimum wages to $15. Our local workers should not be subsidizing them. IS $15 really a livable wage, or just first step? After approving $15, we can dig deeper and see if that really IS an appropriate living wage. And set up single-payer health insurance! Let's go for it!

When should we implement? 1 January 2018?

Here's a link to a LOT of information. A year old, but WOW!

http://www.nelp.org/content/uploads/City-Minimum-Wage-Laws-Recent-Trends-Economic-Evidence.pdf

Thanks, everyone!

Tom

Tom Bender

Editor | June 17, 2017 at 5:03 pm | URL: http://wp.me/p3MYDZ-68P

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