

Dear Alaskan legislators,

The Great State of Alaska state's minimum wage is \$7.75 per hour, that's 17th in the nation, only four states have a minimum wage higher than the federal level but still lower than ours. That's an income of \$16,120 per year for someone working a full-time job being paid minimum wage in Alaska. The initiative, would raise the minimum wage to \$8.75 on Jan. 1, 2015 and \$9.75 the year after that. But the real promise in the initiative comes after that, when it would mandate that the rate would be adjusted for inflation or would be \$1 more than the federal minimum wage, whichever was greater.

When Washington residents voted in 1998 to raise the state's minimum wage and link it to the cost of living, opponents warned the measure would be a job-killer. The prediction hasn't been borne out. In the 15 years that followed, the state's minimum wage climbed to \$9.32 -- the highest in the country. Meanwhile job growth continued at an average 0.8 percent annual pace, 0.3 percentage point above the national rate. Payrolls at Washington's restaurants and bars, portrayed as particularly vulnerable to higher wage costs, expanded by 21 percent. Poverty has trailed the U.S. level for at least seven years.

A similar initiative went before state voters over a decade ago, but was trumped when state lawmakers passed a similar bill. Unfortunately, the next year, lawmakers gutted the inflation adjustment portion of the bill. Legislative action in 2009 put back in a provision for Alaska's minimum to be 50 cents above the federal minimum. And here we are today, with a woefully inadequate minimum wage that does little to help those in entry-level positions. If legislators move again to pre-empt the initiative by passing their own legislation, recognize that this would mute Alaskans' opportunity to voice their position on the issue. If an overwhelming majority of voters support the effort to increase the minimum wage now and into the future, it would be much harder for lawmakers, current and future, to support any legislation that waters down that mandate. And apparently, lawmakers need to hear loud and clear that the minimum wage is too low, and should never be this low again.

As Alaskans know there is a high cost of living here there is no reason we should not have the highest minimum wage in the nation, a place we held for many years.

Please let Alaskans vote on the minimum wage.

Thank you,

Zebulon Woodman

