

## **The Denver Post**

Aug. 30, 2006

### **Analysis says wage hike would help 138,000**

A Nov. 7 ballot initiative would raise the minimum from \$5.15 to \$6.85 an hour. Business owners call the numbers "misleading."

By Beth Potter

The Bell Policy Center said Tuesday that about 138,000 Colorado workers will get raises if voters pass an initiative to raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.85 an hour.

Bell, which describes itself as "progressive," said 73,000 workers in Colorado earn between \$5.15 and \$6.85 an hour. If voters passed the initiative, an additional 65,000 workers who make more than \$6.85 would get raises as employers decide to adjust some lower salaries upward, said Wade Buchanan, president of Bell.

Bell's analysis was blasted by a business-backed group that opposes the initiative.

"It's clear that their numbers are wrong," said Jan Rigg, a spokeswoman for Respect Colorado's Constitution. "I don't know where they obtained their data, but their premise is very misleading."

The skirmish over labor statistics and interpretations indicates the battle to come over the Nov. 7 ballot initiative.

The Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, the Colorado Restaurant Association, the Colorado Retail Council and the Colorado Hotel and Lodging Association are among those opposed to the minimum-wage measure. They object that the minimum-wage hike, adjusted for inflation in future years, would be embedded in the state constitution.

The ballot initiative also calls for wages of waitstaff and other service workers to rise from \$2.13 to \$3.83 an hour. That would also be indexed annually to inflation.

"It will impact business; it will impact employees," Rigg said.

Buchanan, of the Bell Policy Center, countered that "this is about how you treat the lowest-paid among us."

Union groups, including the AFL-CIO, are supporting minimum-wage-hike proposals in Colorado and other states.

The federal minimum wage hasn't been raised in nearly a decade. Worker wages have less purchasing power today than they have in the past 50 years, according to the national Economic Policy Institute.

Brandon Wyatt said he makes \$6.15 per hour working 25 to 30 hours per week at Common Grounds, a Denver coffee shop.

Wyatt, 23, also makes tips that can bump his pay up to \$10 per hour during a six-hour shift.

"I'd be all for (a minimum- wage increase)," Wyatt said. "I don't see how it could affect us negatively."

### **Maximum gain?**

The Nov. 7 ballot initiative would increase Colorado's minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.85 an hour, boosting earnings for 138,000 Colorado workers, according to the Bell Policy Center. Of those:

- More than two-thirds are age 20 or older.
- 40 percent work between 20 and 39 hours per week, and 40 percent work full time.
- 30 percent are married, and one in five is a parent.

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