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House OKs \$7.25 minimum wage

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The state House of Representatives voted yesterday to raise the minimum wage in Kentucky to \$7.25 per hour by July 2008.

Running through the House like a "freight train," according to one legislator, the measure passed 89-10 and was sent to the Senate.

Rep. Mike Harmon, R-Junction City, said he hopes the Republican-controlled Senate adds tax breaks for small businesses when it considers the legislation. The bill nearly mirrors federal legislation that has passed both chambers of Congress that includes tax credit provisions for small businesses. There are differences in the U.S. House and Senate versions, however, which must be worked out before the increases become law.

Rep. J.R. Gray, the Kentucky bill's sponsor, said the state law is needed because it's uncertain if the federal increases will ever become law.

He said raising the minimum wage from \$5.85 is necessary to help Kentucky families survive, noting that even with the increase, they will be well below the poverty line.

"I can't help but be passionate about my plea" for the bill's passage, he said.

Rep. Jimmy Higdon, R-Lebanon, said he would vote for the measure. "This issue nationwide is like a freight train," he said. "If you get in front of it, it will run you over."

Senate action

In the Senate, nude dancers took center stage yesterday, so to speak.

The chamber passed legislation that is similar to Louisville's ordinance prohibiting totally nude entertainment and requiring that dancers and patrons stay at least six feet apart at all times.

Sen. Julie Denton, R-Louisville, said the bill would simply support what cities are trying to do to control adult entertainment.

Senate Bill 95 passed 36-1 with no discussion. Only Sen. Ernesto Scorsone, D-Lexington, voted no.

The Senate also passed a bill that would let billboard owners trim trees and other vegetation in the right of way if they interfere with the ability to see the signs.

Sen. Ernie Harris, R-Crestwood, said the bill would prevent instances such as one last year in Oldham County in which someone clear-cut a stand of trees in front of a billboard during the dead of night.

Similar bills have died in past years in the House. SB 155 passed 32-5 with Sens. Denton, Scorsone, Julian Carroll, D-Frankfort; Ray Jones, D-Pikeville; and Denise Harper Angel, D-Louisville; opposing it.

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