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## GENERAL ASSEMBLY

# House approves wage increase

### Minimum would rise to \$7.25

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**FRANKFORT** - The Kentucky House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved a measure yesterday to raise the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour over the next two years.

"It's the right thing to do," said Rep. J.R. Gray, D-Benton, the bill's sponsor. "It's the moral thing to do."

The measure is similar to bills that have passed both chambers of the U.S. Congress, but the federal bill has stalled because of disagreements over tax credits in the Senate version.

The future of the Kentucky bill is also uncertain. It now goes to the Republican-controlled Senate. Senate President David Williams, R-Burkesville, said through a spokeswoman last night that he was reviewing the bill.

In the past, Williams has said the minimum wage is a federal issue and should be addressed in Congress.

A bill similar to the one that passed the Democratic-controlled state House yesterday was filed in the state Senate before this year's legislative session began, but it has not been heard.

The House bill calls for the current minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour to be raised to \$5.85 an hour when the bill is signed into law, to \$6.55 an hour in July 2008 and to \$7.25 an hour in July 2009.

A few Republican legislators spoke against the House bill.

"History has shown us that when the government dictates wages it doesn't work," said Rep. Jim DeCesare, R-Bowling Green. "This is what this bill leads down to: socialism."

Rep. Brad Montell, R-Shelbyville, said raising the minimum wage was unnecessary. As proof, he pointed to unskilled jobs in his district that paid more than the current minimum wage.

"In my district the free market economy is actually working," Montell said.

Raising the minimum wage would just hurt low wage workers and small businesses, he said.

Gray disputed those claims after the House adjourned.

"The track record is that none of those things will happen," he said.

The original bill called for abolishing the tip credit, which allows tipped employees to be paid less than minimum wage. It also called for a yearly adjustment, based on inflation. Gray said he dropped those measures because of objections from his colleagues.

Getting rid of them made the bill a bad one, but it was the best that could get through the House, said Rep. Jim Wayne, D-Louisville. "This simple bill is trying to right a major injustice, to the poorest, most vulnerable people in this state," he said.

Getting rid of those provisions and numerous phone calls from constituents persuaded Rep. Jimmy Higdon, R-Lebanon, to vote for the bill.

"This issue, nationwide, is like a freight train," he said. "You got to get in front of it or it will run you over."

The House voted 89 to 10 to pass the bill. All 10 who voted against the measure were Republicans.

More coverage

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