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Raising the floor

Now that the U.S. Senate has voted to raise the minimum wage, a \$2.10 pay hike for the 479,000 Americans earning \$5.15 an hour seems almost certain.

"The minimum wage is going to go up," said Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., after the vote. "The only question is whether it's going to take perhaps a week or it's going to take two and a half, two weeks or so."

That's because the wage increase can't take place until the House and Senate reconcile their two very different versions of the bill.

The House passed what Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has called a "clean" version, which only raises the minimum wage. The Senate added some tax breaks for small businesses.

Senate Republicans insisted on those tax breaks, but if the House-Senate reconciliation eliminates them, will they still want to stand in the way?

Meanwhile, in Frankfort, a growing number of Kentucky lawmakers is expressing interest in passing a state minimum-wage bill, too. In previous years, a small cadre unsuccessfully pushed for a wage increase, but this legislative session, the House Democrats have picked the issue as a top priority.

Opponents question the need for Kentucky to address the issue. Senate President David Williams, R-Burkesville, believes it's best left to the congressional delegation.

But there's no certainty the U.S. Senate and House will come together to pass a bill.

Further, 30 states have raised their own state minimum wages. There's nothing radical in taking this step to protect the financially vulnerable citizens of Kentucky, too.

For 10 years, the minimum wage has been stuck at \$5.15 an hour. Lawmakers here and in Washington should be proud to play a role in raising it.

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