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## Senate passes minimum wage bill, heads back to House

By **JOE BIESK**  
Associated Press Writer

FRANKFORT, Ky. (AP) -- Kentucky's minimum wage would increase for the first time in a decade under a bill the Senate approved Thursday evening.

The Republican-controlled Senate voted 33-1 to pass a plan that would gradually increase Kentucky's wage floor to \$7.25 an hour by 2009.

The bill returns to the House for additional consideration.

Jim Sullivan, a pizza driver in Louisville, makes slightly more than the minimum wage, but said he hopes the increase will lift his wages, too.

Sullivan said it's tough to get by on low-end wages.

"The minimum wage only does so much. It's definitely a step in the right direction," he said of the Senate action.

Labor unions and religious groups pushed for the increase throughout the session.

Bill Londrigan, head of the Kentucky AFL-CIO, hailed the Senate action.

"It's been a long time coming and we think it will at least help some of the lowest-paid workers in the commonwealth and give them a little boost," he said.

Raising the minimum wage was among the top priorities of the Democrat-led House. But the measure cleared the Senate with only one dissenting vote.

"Working people should be paid an honorable wage," Sen. Ernesto Scorsone, D-Lexington, said before the vote.

Currently, the minimum wage in Kentucky is \$5.15 an hour. Under the proposal, it would increase to \$5.85 when the legislation takes effect, \$6.55 an hour in July 2008 and \$7.25 an hour July 1, 2009.

Kentucky's plan to raise its minimum wage comes as federal lawmakers in Congress are pondering a similar move.

The Rev. Patrick Delahanty, associate director of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, said he was grateful the bill passed the Senate. Delahanty said it would help thousands of Kentuckians.

"The issue is not compassion or feeling sorry for poor people. The issue is justice," Delahanty said. "It may not be enough to keep people out of poverty, but it's the right thing to do."

Sen. Dick Roeding, R-Lakeside Park, said he voted against the bill because it was not necessary and would likely be addressed at the federal level.

"I don't think that minimum wage is necessary in this state and I think it is an intrusion into the way the free-enterprise system works," Roeding said. "I don't think that we have to do this in this state or any state."

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The legislation is House Bill 305.

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Associated Press writer Bruce Schreiner in Frankfort contributed to this report.

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