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KENTUCKY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Higher minimum wage heading toward passage

Senate OKs hike with 33-1 vote

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FRANKFORT, Ky. -- An increase in the minimum wage at the state level is headed toward final passage.

The Senate voted 33-1 yesterday to approve House Bill 305, with Republican Dick Roeding of Lakeside Park voting no.

Four Republicans -- Julie Denton of Louisville, Damon Thayer of Georgetown, Katie Stine of Southgate and Vernie McGaha of Russell Springs -- left the chamber during the vote.

The bill, similar to federal legislation making its way through Congress, would raise the minimum wage to \$5.85 an hour this year, \$6.55 an hour in 2008 and \$7.25 an hour in 2009.

The current minimum wage in Kentucky is \$5.15 an hour.

The bill must return to the House for consideration of changes made by the Senate.

Senate President David Williams, R-Burkesville, said that years ago as a member of the House, he voted against raising the minimum wage and has since regretted it.

"I believe in the concept of minimum wage if it's a reasonable rate," he said.

Williams said he also supported the increase because of changes made in a Senate committee that would protect a state economic development incentives program used to attract manufacturing jobs in poor counties.

The Senate change would freeze the minimum wage for one year at \$7.73 for a company receiving the incentives. That wage is based on 150 percent of the current federal minimum wage.

Sen. Brett Guthrie, R-Bowling Green, said a higher minimum would discourage employers looking to move to Kentucky.

Because the cost of living is lower in some rural parts of Kentucky, he said, \$7.73 plus benefits is considered a good job in some counties.

On Wednesday, Sen. Ernesto Scorsone, D-Lexington, argued against the change, saying residents of poor, rural counties should not have to settle for continued low-paying jobs.

Although the Senate debated the minimum wage bill Wednesday, it didn't act until yesterday. Scorsone voted for it but said he wants to revisit the system of economic development incentives next year.

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