Why Raise the Minimum Wage?

Deborah Stewart, NASA Communications Officer

Minimum wages have been a hot topic right across the country these days. And rightfully so. Those workers who earn minimum wage don’t just struggle with low wages; many of them do not work enough hours, have shift issues and don’t have access to things like sick days. Many work years without even receiving a small increase in their wages.

The current government in Alberta was elected on a plan to raise the minimum wage to $15 an hour by 2018. Other governments in Canada are looking at similar plans.

Unfortunately, there is a great deal of misinformation about minimum wage. Statistics Canada reported that one in 15 Canadian workers is paid the minimum wages set by their province. In terms of numbers, that translates to approximately one million people. In Alberta, approximately 59,000 workers earn minimum wage.

So who are the workers who earn minimum wage? The stereotype of the minimum wage worker is that they are mainly teenagers employed in the food and service industry. Many including the president of the Fraser Institute have stated that minimum wage jobs are entry-level jobs staffed by young people who live at home.

According to Statistics Canada’s 2015 Labour Force survey, six out of ten workers earning under $15 per hour are 25 years of age or older.

We are still looking for volunteers to help with the breakfast. We have a number of jobs/shifts available including working the grills, serving, set up (day before on July 19) and clean up.

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According to Statistics Canada’s 2015 Labour Force survey, six out of ten workers earning under $15 per hour are 25 years of age or older. That survey also showed that 35% of those minimum wage workers are over 40 years of age. The data also suggests that most of the minimum wage earners are not students.

In Alberta, the current general minimum wage is $11.20 per hour. Those who work serving alcohol currently earn less - $10.70 per hour. This separate liquor server wage is set to be eliminated later this year. The general minimum wage will increase by $1.00 effective October 1, 2016.

The Government of Alberta is standing firm in its resolve to raise the minimum wage to $15 per hour in 2018. Unfortunately, there is mounting pressure from groups to delay the minimum wage increase. The recently launched campaign by Restaurants Canada, a national, not-for-profit association representing Canada’s food service industry is calling on the Government of Alberta to postpone the minimum wage increase until the economy improves. The campaign called Not The Time, suggests that the economic climate in Alberta has changed and the Government should reconsider the proposed changes.

The Alberta Federation of Labour disagrees with the idea that raising the minimum wage should be postponed and feels that a higher minimum wage could actually boost the provincial economy.

According to a study from the 15 is Fair campaign, research shows that increased spending in Alberta from a minimum wage hike would provide a $900 million increase to the provincial economy over three years.

The report breaks down the number of workers in Alberta by hourly wages and examines how much extra money each group would earn in a given week and how much extra they would be able to spend. The report is available on the Alberta Federation of Labour website — http://www.15isfair.ca.

Discussions between government, business, labour and community members concluded in late June 2016. Results of the meetings and surveys have not yet been released.

Joel French, Executive Director of Public Interest Alberta feels the government is making the right decision in keeping its commitment to implement a $15 minimum wage by 2018. He added that raising the minimum wage is an important piece in the government’s goal to reduce and eliminate poverty.

The issue of increased minimum wages will be hotly debated in the months to come. Watch for information about what you can do to join the fight for decent wages in Alberta.
Attend The NASA Breakfast—July 20, 2016

Join us on **Wednesday, July 20, 2016** for the NASA Breakfast. The event runs—rain or shine—from 6:30 am until 11 am. Location is the Quad.

Cost of the breakfast is $2 or free to NASA members who bring their NASA membership card. As in previous breakfasts, we will be serving pancakes, ham, fresh fruit and juice, coffee and tea. New this year is the addition of a non-meat veggie patty or sausage.

We are still looking for volunteers to help with the breakfast. We have a number of jobs/shifts available including working the grills, serving, set up (day before on July 19) and clean up. If you are able to help out, please contact Brendan at the NASA Office—780-439-3181 or email brendan.vanalstine@ualberta.ca.

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**Have Your Say—Participate in the Government of Alberta Consultations**

The Alberta Government is holding a number of online and in-person consultations around important issues such as provincial affordable housing strategies, the Worker’s Compensation Review, and nursing care and home care services.

It is important that government hear from a wide variety of people and organizations on these issues, so we encourage you to participate in these consultations. Please note the deadlines for each consultation vary.

**WCB:** The government has set up an independent, three-member panel to conduct a comprehensive review of the workers’ compensation system, and is inviting the public to provide their thoughts in an online questionnaire or by written submission - [http://www.alberta.ca/wcb-review-get-involved.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/wcb-review-get-involved.aspx)

**Nursing Care and Home Care:** The Alberta government is asking residents, families, caregivers, and members of the public to share their thoughts on legislation related to access to nursing homes, home support services (e.g., light housekeeping, laundry), meal requirements, meeting the needs of caregivers and more. For more information, visit [http://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=429558469DD9B-F131-2182-28A5648936C9B835](http://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=429558469DD9B-F131-2182-28A5648936C9B835)

**Affordable Housing:** The government is developing a strategy to improve the affordable housing system. Strategy development includes stakeholder engagement through regional meetings and public input through the on-line survey - [http://www.seniors-housing.alberta.ca/housing/affordable_housing_strategy_engagement.html](http://www.seniors-housing.alberta.ca/housing/affordable_housing_strategy_engagement.html)
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