



<http://www.latimes.com/business/careers/work/la-na-wage24jul24,1,3011487.story?coll=la-headlines-business-careers>
From the Los Angeles Times

Minimum wage called elusive for some

As the federal pay baseline is raised for the first time in a decade, some analysts say it isn't enforced strictly enough.

By Joel Havemann
Times Staff Writer

July 24, 2007

WASHINGTON — Today is a day that organized labor has awaited for nearly 10 years: The federal minimum wage jumps from \$5.15 to \$5.85 an hour, the first of three increases scheduled by Congress earlier this year.

But for low-income workers, the minimum wage is useful only if it is enforced, and many students of American wage patterns believe that the law is not enforced strictly enough.

"For the raise for our nation's workers to mean something, we have to pay serious attention to the jobs with persistent violators," said Catherine K. Ruckelshaus, litigation director of the National Employment Law Project. "And that means getting the Department of Labor to wake up and enforce our baseline standards."

Bob Simoneau, workforce development director for the National Assn. of State Workforce Agencies, said that because the law is so complex, many minimum-wage workers — especially those who don't speak English as a first language — find it hard to understand.

Complicating the law, he said, was the overlap between the federal minimum and those enacted separately by 45 states. Thirty of those states have minimums higher than the \$5.85 that takes effect nationally today. California's \$7.50 minimum wage is higher than all but those in Washington state (\$7.93), Oregon (\$7.80), Connecticut (\$7.65) and Vermont (\$7.53).

California is also one of only seven states that don't count tips toward the required minimum wage. And there are exceptions in the federal minimum-wage law for young workers and farm workers.

Simoneau also said a "hint of retaliation" from some employers discouraged their workers from demanding the minimum wage.

But he said the posters that employers were required to display at prominent central work stations carefully spelled out the terms of the minimum-wage law in clear and simple language.

"Many workers don't have a central gathering place," Ruckelshaus countered. In particular, she said, home healthcare workers typically traveled from their homes to those of their clients.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics found that, in 2002, 2 million workers made less than the minimum wage, and a later study by the Urban Institute estimated 2 million immigrants were working for less than minimum wage.

The Labor Department does not keep track of the number of complaints, but Ruckelshaus said the number of civil cases demanding a minimum wage rose as Labor Department enforcement became more lax.

The number of cases climbed 70% in the first four years of this decade alone, according to the Bureau of National Affairs, a private company that publishes information and analysis on legal, economic, regulatory and legislative issues.

No Labor Department officials were available for comment.

joel.havemann@latimes.com

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at latimes.com/archives.

TMSReprints

Article licensing and reprint options

Copyright 2007 Los Angeles Times | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)
[Home Delivery](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Archives](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Help](#)

PARTNERS:

