

NEW JERSEY POLITICS

N.J. voters approve constitutional amendment raising minimum wage

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Comment

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TRENTON — New Jersey voters overwhelmingly approved a ballot question today that will raise the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$8.25 an hour in January and amends the state Constitution to tie future increases to inflation.

Voters also approved a ballot question that allows veterans groups to use the proceeds from the bingo, raffles and other games of chance to repair their meeting halls or cover other building expenses.

The business community put up a tough fight to defeat the minimum wage measure, spending about \$1 million to persuade the public the measure will lead to job losses and undermine their ability to move past the lingering effects of the recession. But they were outspent by unions and other supporters who raised \$1.3 million to wage a very public campaign that included large rallies in cities across the state.

In the end, the amendment passed with nearly 61 percent supporting it.

"New Jersey's voters should be thanked tonight for understanding that the state's low-wage workers need more than \$7.25 an hour to survive in this high-cost state," said Gordon MacInnes, president of New Jersey Policy Perspective, a left-leaning think tank that advocated for passage. "Increasing New Jersey's minimum wage will give nearly half a million working New Jerseyans a crucial leg up while pumping hundreds of millions of dollars into the state's economy."

MacInnes' group has said raising the minimum wage will have a ripple effect and increase the pay for roughly 400,000 people who earn \$9.25 an hour and less — a claim opponents called disingenuous.

"With the increase, New Jersey becomes the 20th state to establish a minimum wage higher than the federal minimum," of \$7.25, MacInnes added. "This will prevent the wage floor's real value from eroding over time as it has in the past, and it will ensure that New Jersey's low-wage workers don't fall even further behind."

Laurie Ehlbeck, state director of the National Federation of Independent Business, accused the ballot question's supporters of misleading the public by not explaining how their vote will drive future wage increases for years to come.

"People don't realize it's not just the minimum wage," she said. "Most people think, 'who can live on \$7.25 an hour?'"

"We honestly believe there will be a loss of jobs and opportunities," Ehlbeck said. "They are not going to hire someone, they will give an employee fewer hours, they may reduce the benefits. They don't want to do anything to hurt their employees, but they are working on a very small profit margin."

Despite her disappointment in the vote, Ehlbeck said she was pleased Gov. Chris Christie will get a second term.

"Small business is the backbone of New Jersey's economy

and we'll have a Governor for four more years who understands that," she said. "That's very encouraging."

But not all business owners opposed the measure. Members of the New Jersey Main Street Alliance released a statement explaining why they thought a higher minimum wage was a win for everyone.

"A higher minimum wage will actually help business owners by reducing absenteeism and worker turnover, which costs businesses way more than nickel and dime-ing on wages," Mitch Cahn, president of Unionwear, a clothing manufacturer in Newark with 120 employees, said. "Secure workers earning a living wage are productive workers and better consumers. A higher minimum wage just makes fiscal sense."

NJ Voters Approve Minimum Wage Increase

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