

# Sen. Wirch: GOP obstruction sets Wisconsin workers further behind as twenty-five other states raise minimum wage

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Hard working people in twenty states woke up on New Year's Day with a little more money in their paychecks; those in five other states and the District of Columbia will take home more at some other point in 2022. That's because, whether through legislation or ballot measure, these twenty five states, plus D.C., have increased their minimum wages. These are both "blue" states - California, New York, Connecticut - and "red" states - Arizona, Montana, South Dakota. Our neighboring states - Michigan, Illinois and Minnesota - are on the list. Six states are even increasing their minimum wages by a dollar per hour or more.

I'm sure you're wondering about where the working people of Wisconsin stand, and the answer is that they stand in the same place they have been since 2009. That was the last time that our state's minimum wage was raised. Our state minimum is \$7.25, also the federal minimum, which ties Wisconsin for last among the states. This, combined with the fact that the Consumer Price Index used to measure cost of living increased by 23% from 2009 to 2021, means Wisconsin's working families have to stretch their dollars farther than ever just to get by.

This quagmire didn't happen due to lack of trying or public opposition. In every session since that last increase in 2009, I authored or co-authored legislation to increase the state minimum wage. Some were modest increases - to \$7.60 per hour - and some were larger. Each and every time, the bill was stopped dead in its tracks by the Legislature's Republican majority. The bills have never been given so much as a public hearing, despite strong public support. More than a dozen

Wisconsin counties and municipalities have held advisory referendums on increasing the minimum wage; they have all been approved by voters. Numerous County Boards have passed resolutions calling for a higher minimum wage. The gold-standard Marquette Law School poll of Wisconsin voters in August 2011 found a majority support a \$15 minimum wage, 51-44%. The last time the poll asked the question about a general increase in minimum wage, the number was even higher, 57-38%. Nationally, support for higher minimum wages transcends party. One of my favorite facts from the November 2020 election is that Florida voters, by large margins, voted for Donald Trump AND a step-by-step increase in the state's minimum wage to \$15. Still, Wisconsin Republicans continue to obstruct and impede. What gives?

Wisconsin is considered the most gerrymandered state in the country, giving Republicans large advantages in both houses of the Legislature and shielding many of their members from the pressures of close elections. That, combined with lobbying from big business and corporate donors, has made Republican legislators to this point deadset against raising the minimum wage.

That can change. We currently have a Governor in Tony Evers who fully backs a raise and has proposed it in each of his budget proposals; we will have new maps for the next election cycle; we have public support; and we have data showing that raising the minimum wage benefits more than just minimum wage workers. We need to talk about this issue and continue to push and prod Republicans. With enough pressure, the dam will break, and we'll all be lifted as a result.