

Government**Business community applauds Christie veto on \$15 wage ... for now**

By **Andrew George**, September 6, 2016 at 11:45 AM

While Gov. Chris Christie's decision last week to veto a bill that aimed to gradually increase New Jersey's minimum wage to \$15 per hour over the next five years has received praise from the state's business community, the subsequent prospect of a ballot box initiative also has sparked some concern.

Put forth earlier this year by Democrats in the Legislature, the measure Christie vetoed called for an immediate increase in New Jersey's minimum wage, currently set at \$8.38 per hour, to \$10.10 per hour, and would have included annual hikes of \$1 to \$1.25 per hour plus the rate of inflation until the \$15 per hour cap was met.

In remarks made following the veto at an event last Tuesday at a grocery store in Pennington, Christie called the bill a "complete pander to folks who are uninformed because they neither receive the minimum wage nor pay it."

New Jersey Business & Industry Association CEO and President Michele Siekerka said that, despite the phase-in period, the proposed increase would have been "too much, too fast" for business owners to deal with.

"The governor's veto has saved thousands of small businesses from the negative impacts of a 79 percent increase in the minimum wage," Siekerka said. "Had this bill been signed, it would not only have hurt the New Jersey economy, but it would have hurt the exact workers the proponents of this policy are trying to help."

New Jersey Chamber of Commerce CEO and President Tom Bracken said that such a drastic hike could have a "potentially catastrophic effect on business, on the state economy and, most importantly, on many of the workers this wage increase is supposed to help."

Bracken added that "there are better and more effective ways to help low-wage earners and the working poor."

"We need to enact policies that attract and encourage investment and generate economic growth in New Jersey," Bracken said. "That is how you open create real opportunities for workers at all levels and make it a win for everyone."

Democrats, however, have already indicated that they plan on taking the issue to next year's ballot in the form of a voter referendum.

"We have to fight this fight now," Christie said last week. "Between now and next November."

Siekerka noted the focus right now shouldn't be on turning to the ballot box to achieve results.

"Rather than moving forward with a constitutional amendment, we should take this opportunity to focus our efforts on workforce development to ensure that minimum wage workers can acquire the skills to obtain higher-level positions at higher salaries," Siekerka said.

John Boyd Jr., principal of the Princeton-based Boyd Co., said that the thought of the issue becoming a ballot box initiative is a "disturbing prospect."

"This decision is very important and will have dramatic implications for the state's business climate," Boyd said. "It should be settled by the state's lawmakers, accountable to the electorate."

Bracken added that there needs to be more communication among lawmakers.

"We believe proposals coming from our suggested dialogue would result in solutions to many economic issues, including this one, and go a long way to achieving the goal of making New Jersey more competitive and more affordable," Bracken said.

"The minimum wage increase does neither."

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