

Poverty persists for Minnesota minorities

Written by Jonathan Tolliver
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It's time for Minnesota to join the ranks of other progressive states and raise the minimum wage to a level that respects a worker's right to be able to pay for basic expenses after a hard week's work.

This seems obvious, right? We've got a Democratic controlled legislature and a popular enough Democratic governor who've both expressed a desire to see the wage floor rise.

The need is certainly there. While Minnesota consistently has a lower poverty rate than most other states, our rate amongst minorities is consistently higher than national averages. These same minorities tend to be the ones stuck in minimum wage jobs, with very few attainable options for improving their standard of living. And this doesn't even begin to address the fact that the poverty line is drawn at a devastatingly low income level, at about \$2,000 a month for a family of four.

Conservative arguments against the hike, arguments that have long been debunked, include the specter of mass layoffs and a lack of growth in the private sector. We know this not to be true based on a broad swath of studies that indicate that even an aggressive wage hike paid for entirely through a raise in the cost of goods will have very little effect on consumers' ability to purchase those goods. Most folks wouldn't even notice the difference.

So we have a choice here. Will we continue to have one of the lowest minimum wages in the country, with a sharp divide in income between minorities and non-minorities, or will we work to bring the wage up to humane levels? Nine dollars and fifty cents isn't even that bold a proposal. In Minnesota, the average cost of caring for a family of four is \$58,343, meaning each parent would have to earn \$14 per hour. Nothing would make me happier than to see that floor set at \$14 an hour.

We can do that. Minnesota has been an early adopter on so many progressive issues, from education reform, to marriage equality, to collective bargaining and back around again.

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Whatever it is that's keeping the Senate from supporting the \$9.50 number needs to be removed. The poor in our state deserve, and require, better wages than the pittance we give them for oftentimes strenuous, stigmatized work.

Let's get this done.