

Obama visits W

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Following his State of the Union address, **President Barack Obama** visited Asheville last Wednesday to reiterate plans to raise the minimum wage and make manufacturing a priority in western North Carolina and beyond.

"Our job as Americans is to restore the basic bargain that says if you work hard, if you are willing to meet your responsibilities, you can get ahead," Obama said in his address at Linamar manufacturing plant.

The president's visit fell a day after he announced his plans to see the minimum wage increased nationally to \$9, up from North Carolina's \$7.25, which is on par with the national average according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

"That's what we should be focused on," Obama said on Wednesday. "How do we make sure that people who are willing to work hard can make a decent living and look after their family?"

Obama said the effort to provide for middle class families and improve the nation's economy starts with the aggregation of home-grown industry.

"There are three things we should be asking. Number one – how do we bring more jobs to America? Number two – how do we equip people with the skills they need to do those jobs? And number three – how do we make sure that once they have a job, it leads to a

decent living?" Obama said.

The president said while corporate America experiences great financial growth, an increase in the minimum wage would lessen the socio-economic divide and provide some relief to ensure provision for the middle class.

"I believe we reward effort and determination with wages that allow working families to raise their kids and ahead," Obama said. "It's time for an increase in the minimum wage, because if you work full-time, you shouldn't be in poverty."

The president proposed to enact a wage increase by 2015, providing a better minimum income for more than 15 million Americans, according to the Obama Administration.

Republicans previously opposed minimum wage reform on the basis that companies will no longer seek to hire candidates with lower skill sets and less educational experience. Obama first proposed a minimum wage increase in 2008, hoping to see workers making \$9.50 an hour by 2011.

Obama said better opportunities for American laborers will be a top priority in Washington, D.C., for the duration of his presidency.

"The true engine of America's economic growth has always been the middle class," Obama said. "Create the middle class when it's growing, when it's thriving, when there are ladders of opportunity for people to do a little better each year and then make s