

The Blue Banner's View

NC needs to develop a plan to increase minimum wage

It may be difficult to remember, but prospects for minimum wage workers in North Carolina were looking up not too long ago.

In early 2007, North Carolina's rate of \$6.15 per hour beat out the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour.

Following a series of nationwide increases, the wage came to linger at \$7.25, the national minimum, since July 24, 2009.

States such as New York, New Jersey and Rhode Island will see their minimum wage increase to \$8 per hour or more in 2014.

North Carolina needs to end the stagnation and raise the state wage comparably.

Where many armchair economists remind us of a Center for Economic and Policy Research study which claimed the minimum wage should be \$21.72 per hour were inflation accounted for, such a lofty outcome — more than twice the highest state minimum wage of \$9.32 in Washington — feels like an overzealous pipe dream.

However, consider a recent college graduate facing the increasing reality of living in North Carolina on a minimum wage as they strive toward a more stable career. At 40 hours per week,

an employee making minimum wage would earn \$290 each week before taxes.

Apartment review and rent aggregation website ApartmentRatings.com projects the average apartment rent in the Asheville area for 2014 at \$823 for one-bedroom apartments and \$1,055 for two-bedroom ones.

Never mind how many employers shift schedules meticulously to prevent employees from working enough hours to earn benefits, but were our hypothetical employee to work full-time every week, they would still struggle to rent the average one-bedroom apartment in Asheville, to speak nothing of utilities, groceries or the ever-encroaching burden of student loans.

Bump the state minimum wage up to \$8.70 per hour, as Connecticut has this year, and the outlook looks a little more optimistic.

Take into consideration how Connecticut plans to raise their minimum wage yet again in 2015 to \$9 per hour, and a minimum wage job seems much less unbearable.

North Carolina needs to implement a plan to keep minimum wage on the rise, especially as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

Program benefits undergo constant cuts.

Even the most conservative pundit hell-bent on limiting “handouts” must concede workers need a break somewhere in order to survive. A higher minimum wage would benefit employees on the merits of how much they work instead of filling in holes left by the broken system.

The mythic “American Dream” of rising from abject poverty to wealth and prosperity feels farther from reality than ever before, propagated mainly by those already at the top who intend to maintain their wealth.

Baby boomer critics publish sweeping generalizations of our generation, calling us “entitled” for balking in the face of increasing wealth gaps and stagnating wages.

Maybe college graduates have simply begun to realize the United States abides by an unbalanced class system many would rather ignore than fix.

We may have some illusions to shed about achieving our personal dreams, or even the “American Dream,” but a fair minimum wage seems like a reasonable request to prevent us from slipping into the “American Nightmare.”

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The Blue Banner is a designated forum for free speech and welcomes letters to the editor, considering them on basis of interest, space and timeliness. Letters and articles should be emailed to the editor-in-chief or the appropriate section editor.

Letters should include the writer's name, year in school and major or other relationship to UNCA. Include a telephone number to aid in verification. All articles are subject to editing.