

Wage hike a contentious subject



PHOTO: CURTIS WILSON

Nakia McLendon, a contract barber at No Grease Barber Shop in Charlotte, says raising the minimum wage will help North Carolinians.

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businesses suffer when workers can't afford goods and services.

"I'm trying to make them understand it's a business move," he said. "The state has always had a strong progressive streak. If you're working hard, the door ought

to be cracked so you can at least have a chance at opportunity."

Business owners, of course, are skeptical. The National Federation of Independent Business, a Washington-based lobbyist group, opposes a hike as "devastating" to N.C. job growth.

"When the minimum wage goes up, small and seasonal firms feel a bigger pinch than large ones," NFIB's Research Foundation argues on the organization's web site. "Additionally, wage levels take higher priority when a region, industry, season and local labor market conditions influence the number of workers in minimum-wage jobs."

The Charlotte Chamber of Commerce hasn't staked a position on the issue, spokeswoman Erica Johnson said.

Damian Johnson, who co-owns No Grease Barber Shop with brother Jermaine, said the proposed increase would be a good gesture, but it isn't something African

Americans view as an enhancement to their quality of life.

"Any community that has to depend on minimum wage is destined to fail," Johnson said. "I don't think it would make any difference."

Johnson believes the increase could offer some short-term quality of life benefit for workers moving toward better paying jobs, but doesn't see it as an economic solution.

"If it's an alternate for a process that's fine, but we can't depend on that to pacify us," he said.

Nakia McLendon, a contractual barber at No Grease, thinks the increase would be a relief to low wage earners.

"It would be a great help, at \$5.15 especially with the way gas is, that's not enough money to live on," he said. "Working for minimum wage is degrading to a certain extent, I know for people who are trying to raise a family that's not enough. If

they are raising minimum wage and not going to raise the taxes then that would help."

That's what Moore, a possible candidate for governor in 2008, is pushing. In addition to higher wages, he backs an earned income tax credit for heads of households that would lessen the tax burden for the working poor.

"We as taxpayers are already paying," for social programs that benefit the poorest North Carolinians, Moore said. "I don't think we should subsidize people who should be paying more."

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Patti does Apollo

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diabetes doohicky spokeswoman) Patti LaBelle's appearance at the CIAA basketball tournament are moving faster than the law allows. Miss Thang is headlining "Showtime At the Apollo" March 2 at the Convention Center, but the best part will likely be the amateur competition. Contestants from the 12 CIAA schools will show off their talents, which ought to be good for a few laughs. Tickets are \$37 for grown folks, students \$25. Fly gets in free, unless a pest strip somehow becomes a distraction. Proceeds going to a scholarship fund.

• Dave Chappelle may or may not be coming to Charlotte Monday for a sneak peak of his movie.

Fly knows Chappelle is funny, but is he really crazy? Even Fly watched Oprah and thought somebody had eaten the wrong brownies before sitting across from O.

The people running the screening made sure that everybody knew that they have no more control of Dave than Comedy Central, so if he rolls up, they'll be just as surprised as everybody else. Here's hoping he doesn't yell out "I'm Rick James" during the screening.

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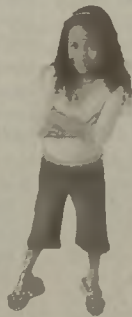
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