

# Ballot measure to increase minimum wage gets an audience, despite lack of opposition

Suzanna Caldwell, Alaska Dispatch News, July 31, 2014

In the almost 20 years Alaska Common Ground chair Cliff Groh has been involved in the organization, he has spent a lot of time organizing, participating and moderating debates.

So when it came time to find an Alaskan willing to argue against Ballot Measure 3, an initiative that could increase Alaska's minimum wage, he was surprised to find it was a challenge to come up with participants.

"It's usually not this hard," Groh said.

Part of that is timing – it's still early for the initiative, which will be voted on in November – but the topic is also far from controversial. So far, no formal group has organized to oppose the measure. A poll conducted by the Alaska House Majority Caucus in March found that 69 percent of respondents supported a minimum wage increase. Even the Republican-led House of Representatives passed a substantially similar measure during this year's session, though the bill never made it through the Senate.

After scouring the business community, Groh said the organization couldn't come up with anyone who would agree to participate in a debate. Luckily Groh found himself at a "party" of economists – the International Association of Energy Economists – earlier this year and was able, through a little networking, to find Kyle Hampton, an assistant professor of economics at the University of Alaska Anchorage

and director of the UAA Center for Economic Education.

Hampton took on Ed Flanagan, former Department of Labor commissioner and current co-sponsor of the measure that would increase Alaska's minimum wage. The initiative would increase the minimum wage from \$7.75 per hour to \$8.75 an hour in 2015, then increase it another dollar in 2016, after which it would be adjusted annually for inflation. If the federal minimum wage increases to an amount over those figures (which is likely, given the current push by the White House to raise it to \$10.10) the minimum wage would be one dollar over the federal minimum.

Hampton argued in front of a crowd of about 75 people at Anchorage's Z.J. Loussac Public Library Wilda Marston Theater that the minimum wage is mostly an arbitrary figure that doesn't necessarily lift people out of poverty. He suggests that the wage increases offer a short-term solution to a long-term problem of poverty.

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