

Minimum wage increase passes in five states

Our reporter
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Voters approved increases in the minimum wage in five states and the city of San Francisco, according to ballot tallies overnight. In four of the five states, the same voters elected Republicans to US Senate seats, although the Republican Party has blocked any increase in the federal minimum wage.

In Alaska, voters approved an increase in the minimum wage from \$7.25 an hour to \$9.75 an hour by 2016. The margin was two to one. Republican Dan Sullivan defeated incumbent Democratic Senator Mark Begich by 52 to 45 percent.

In Arkansas, an increase in the state minimum wage from \$6.25 an hour to \$8.50 an hour in 2015 passed by 65 percent to 35 percent, while Republican Tom Cotton defeated incumbent Democratic Senator Mark Pryor by 57 percent to 39 percent. Both Cotton and Pryor had opposed increases in the federal minimum wage, backed by the largest corporation headquartered in Arkansas, low-wage king Wal-Mart.

In South Dakota, an increase in the minimum wage to \$8.50 an hour in 2015 passed by 53 percent to 47 percent, while Republican Mike Rounds won the Senate seat being vacated by retiring Democrat Tim Johnson.

In Nebraska, the minimum wage will rise to \$9 by 2016, after voters approved the measure by 59 percent to 41 percent. Republican Ben Sasse won the Senate seat easily, succeeding retiring Republican Mike Johanns.

The minimum wages in Alaska and South Dakota will be indexed to inflation, so they will continue to rise automatically in step with consumer prices.

In Illinois, the sixth-largest US state, voters approved an advisory measure placed on the ballot by the Democratic Party in a cynical effort to boost turnout. The Democrats, who controlled the state legislature and the governorship, could have enacted the minimum wage immediately, but chose an advisory measure that

would have no legal effect. The maneuver failed of its aim, as voters expressed their support for an increase but threw out Democratic Governor Pat Quinn, replacing him with Republican hedge fund mogul Bruce Rauner.

Also Tuesday, the city of San Francisco increased its local minimum wage to \$15.

In Massachusetts, where Republican Charlie Baker defeated Democrat Martha Coakley in the governor's race, the same voters approved a measure requiring employers to provide paid sick leave to workers.

In another statewide referendum, California voters approved a ballot measure that reduced possession of most illegal drugs and several other nonviolent felonies to the status of misdemeanors. Some 40,000 people a year will have reduced jail terms as a result, and more than 7,000 prison inmates will be eligible to file motions to have their sentences reduced retroactively.

While the measure was packaged as a means of reducing prison overcrowding, it is nonetheless significant as a blow against law-and-order demagoguery in a state that once passed a vicious "three-strikes" law mandating life imprisonment for a third criminal conviction, no matter how trivial the offense.

Voters rejected so-called "personhood" amendments in North Dakota and Colorado. These would change the state constitution to define life as beginning at conception, a backdoor approach to outlawing abortion as well as some forms of contraception.



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