

# Opinion

Portsmouth Herald (N.H.) • Thursday, March 15, 2007

## Wage policy affects women

March 1 — To the Editor:

A bill to raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25 is currently before the New Hampshire Legislature.

In considering this bill, lawmakers should understand that most of the state's minimum wage workers are women. According to a study for the New Hampshire Women's Policy Institute, women made up 47 percent of the state's work force, but 67 percent of its minimum or near-minimum wage workers, based on 2000 Census data. More recent data show the same disparity exists today.

In 2004, 4 percent of full-time working women had earnings equal to minimum wage or less, compared to 2 percent of full-time working men, according to estimates by researchers from the University of New Hampshire Carsey Institute. This amounts to about 7,370 women and 5,490 men, or about 12,860 full-time workers, with women twice as likely as men to be earning these wages. These estimates do not include the thousands of part-time workers — again, predominantly women — who also earn minimum wage.

Clearly, there are trade-offs to raising the minimum wage, and women business owners — like their male counterparts — may face tough choices in meeting the costs of any potential increase. Whatever lawmakers decide to do, they should also examine policies that enable women to advance economically in other ways. Programs that support training and education, that facilitate women moving into higher-paying job sectors, and that provide child care and other family supports for low-income families could help advance both women's and men's earnings in the state, and support economic growth.

The N.H. Women's Policy Institute provides data to inform decision-making on issues affecting women, and takes no position on the current legislative proposal to raise the minimum wage.

**Katherine Merrow**  
Executive director  
New Hampshire Women's  
Policy Institute, Concord