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the nation's highest minimum wage.

Jun. 03, 2014



The Seattle City Council Monday unanimously approved a \$15 minimum wage, creating a path over the next seven years to provide the city's lowest-paid workers the nation's highest minimum wage.

Fast-food workers, union organizers and labor activists celebrated on the City Hall Plaza after the historic vote with cake and ice cream provided by some local small

businesses who joined in support of a plan that will phase-in the \$15 minimum over

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Seattle and the low pay of even full-time minimum wage workers who currently earn about \$19,300 a year.

“I think the fast food walkouts tapped into the frustration and anger at seeing lives shut down because of low wages,” said Councilmember Nick Licata. ” We all see how much money is being concentrated in a few hands.”

Both mayoral candidates supported the idea during the 2013 campaign, and once elected, Mayor Ed Murray made it a priority second only to police reform; he stood in the back of council chambers as the vote was taken. A \$15 minimum wage passed in SeaTac in November after both labor and business spent heavily fighting each other on the measure.

The election of socialist City Councilmember Kshama Sawant in November provided pressure from the left. Her organization, 15 Now, made raising the minimum wage a political rallying cry and convinced many business leaders to work for a compromise proposal on Murray's Income Inequality Advisory Committee.

That committee of labor, business and nonprofit leaders agreed May 1 on a phased-in approach, after four months of tense and sometimes bitter negotiations that seemingly left none of the 24-members completely satisfied. Labor didn't like the lengthy ramp-up to get workers to \$15 an hour; business objected to the phaseout of credit for benefits and tips which they argued were part of their workers' wages.

At the 11th-hour, Murray told a core group of negotiators to come up with a proposal or he would introduce to the City Council a measure much closer to the 15 Now plan.

Public opinion also seems to strongly support the higher minimum wage, adding pressure for the politicians to adopt the compromise plan. Polling in January and May found strong support among likely Seattle voters for raising the minimum wage,

with almost three-fourths — 74 percent — in May saying they supported the

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the varied phase-in time was unfair and that it planned to sue.

“The suit will seek to overturn the unfair and discriminatory minimum wage plan that was approved by the City Council. IFA will fight to preserve the tenets of the franchise model, which has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy business ownership and created economic opportunity for many,” the release said.

Ubah Aden, a Somali immigrant who works as a home health care aide, was at City Hall for the landmark vote.

“A lot of people thought, Oh no, it's not going to happen. It's happening.” Aden, who makes \$10.95 an hour said, It's going to make a big change not only for myself, but for others in my shoes.”

The City Council did slightly modify the compromise agreement. Last week members added a training wage for teens and disabled workers and delayed the start date from January to April. But in large part, the plan held.

Both of those amendments were debated again Monday before the vote, and both narrowly passed. Worker advocates in the audience frequently interrupted council members with jeers and chants.

Under the bill adopted Monday, minimum-wage workers will get raises starting April 1, the date set by the council. Employees of businesses with more than 500 workers will start at \$11 and reach \$15 in 2018. Large businesses that provide health care will have an additional year and those with fewer than 500 will be required to pay \$15 in 2019. Small businesses that claim a credit for tips and benefits, will reach \$15 an hour in 2021.

By 2025, according to city projections, all workers will be earning a minimum wage of \$18.13 an hour, nearly double the state's current \$9.32 an hour.

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