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May. 31, 2013

SACRAMENTO — The California Assembly passed a proposal Thursday to hike California's minimum wage from \$8 to \$9.25 an hour over the next three years and require future increases to keep pace with inflation.

Higher wages would "allow our families to provide for their children, pay their bills and give them dignity and respect," said Assemblyman Luis Alejo (D-Watsonville), the bill's author.

The measure, which now goes to the Senate, was one of scores that lawmakers advanced as they raced to meet an internal deadline to keep legislation moving.

Assembly members also voted to allow thousands of child-care workers to join unions. And they approved a proposed change in school disciplinary rules to reduce suspensions and expulsions.

A controversial proposal to ban single-use plastic grocery bags stalled in the Senate. It was the third time such a bill has failed amid heavy lobbying by the plastics industry.

The minimum wage proposal was one of the most hotly debated issues in the Capitol on Thursday, with powerful business groups including the California Chamber of Commerce saying it would be a "job killer."

Republicans said the bill would make it prohibitively expensive for companies to employ new workers.

“You have to legislate in the real world,” said Assemblyman Donald P. Wagner (R-

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the household to earn a living wage,” she said.

The bill, AB 10, passed 44 to 24.

The Assembly also approved a bill that would allow some child-care workers to unionize, which estimates show could cost the state tens of millions of dollars in increased wages and benefits. The measure is sponsored by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and the Service Employees International Union, which stand to gain new dues-paying members if the proposal is enacted.

Democrats said unionization would help improve standards for child care and boost workers' standard of living.

“I'm willing to pay for quality,” Mitchell said.

Republicans criticized the bill, AB 641, saying more state money would be used to increase workers' pay rather than caring for children.

“It drives up the cost of child care for low-income, working parents,” said Wagner.

Brown vetoed a previous version of the bill two years ago, expressing concerns about its cost.

The Assembly voted to prevent schools from expelling students for defying a teachers' directions or disrupting classroom activities. The measure, by Assemblyman Roger Dickson (D-Sacramento), would also prevent schools from suspending students for such activity until the third violation.

The measure, which affects grades 6 through 12, passed 48 to 24 and received some bipartisan support. When students are sent home, “They play video games, or they're out on the street,” said Assemblywoman Kristin Olsen (R-Modesto). “We need to make sure these kids have every opportunity to learn.”

The Los Angeles Unified School District took similar action this month, becoming

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Half-a-dozen Democrats joined Republicans in opposing the measure, while others abstained. Opponents said the bill would cost 2,000 jobs in the plastics industry in California, many of them in working-class communities.

“This bill is an attack on low economic areas,” said Sen. Ronald S. Calderon (D-Montebello). “It’s an attack on minority-owned small business.”

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