

My name is Susan Barton. I live in Nyssa, Oregon, a small community nestled alongside the banks of the Snake River. I live in a different time zone from the rest of Oregon; I can drive (or actually even walk) to Idaho faster than I can drive (or walk) to any community in Oregon. I live along the Oregon Trail, where individuals seeking a better way of life risked everything they had to come to Oregon. But I fear that our great state is headed toward disaster.

I was raised in Stayton, where I picked strawberries, raspberries and beans in the summer and later worked for NORPAC. After graduating from high school, I obtained a job in the typing pool of a government agency on the East Coast. I married, returned to Oregon, had a son, and was divorced. Over the years, I worked to develop my secretarial skills and was promoted, eventually working as an executive secretary. My secretarial skills provided a good job in the Portland area where I bought a house and raised my son. I started college in my 40s (guess I'm a late bloomer!) and graduated from Portland Community College. I remarried and moved to Nyssa where I finished my education, obtaining a BS in Business and Health from Eastern Oregon University. I became active in my community as a volunteer and spent 4 years as secretary for the local chamber of commerce.

Nyssa is well aware of what it is to lose living wage jobs and employees. In January 2005, The Amalgamated Sugar Co., LLC closed the sugar beet process plant in Nyssa. One of 4 factories, and the only one in Oregon, the closure resulted in the loss of 300 jobs. My husband was one of those who lost his job. Fortunately, he was rehired at the Nampa plant. His commute of 5 minutes became a commute of 40 minutes; but we were relieved he was one of the few rehired.

Since we both retired, my husband and I have spent many days traveling. We enjoy taking the backroads and eating at local "mom and pop" restaurants as we revel in the beauty of Oregon. We love Joseph and Enterprise, the Post/Paulina Road, Route 66 between Ashland and Klamath Falls, Coos Bay, and...well I could go on and on about the amazing places to visit in Oregon. Much of what we enjoy – good food and being tourists – is threatened by the proposed increase in Oregon's minimum wage.

A delicious hamburger, fries and a soda is probably my husband's favorite eat out meal. If you, too, enjoy the all-American burger, fries and soda you can thank Malheur County farmers and ranchers. We grow the wheat for the bun, raise beef for the burger. A slice of onion might top that burger, or perhaps onion rings on the side, made from Malheur County grown onions. (Oregon ranks #1 in storage onions.) French fries are made from potatoes grown in Malheur County and processed at Ore-Ida in Ontario. Include a soda beverage and thank the sugar beet growers of Malheur County. After your meal, chew a piece of gum, or pop a mint into your mouth and you can again thank Malheur County where we also grow mint. Quoting from *Growing Oregon* the Oregon Department of Agriculture's magazine (which is a really wonderful publication) "Burgerville partners with local farmers, ranchers and producers to source food for more than 70 percent of its menu." (*Growing Oregon* 2015-16, pp. 33) (WOW! No wonder I can't wait to get to The Dalles and the nearest Burgerville!) What will happen when that food becomes more expensive, as well as increased wages for Burgerville employees? How many jobs will Burgerville (and other fast food restaurants) eliminate in order to stay in business? How long will you be willing to wait for that "fast" food meal with fewer employees taking orders and cooking food? Of the Top 10 Industries listed in the *Oregon Blue Book*, food services/drinking places is number 1. Social assistance is number 10, but with more people unemployed, that might rise (particularly if people move here thinking they can make \$15 per hour with a minimum wage job, then after arriving discover an extremely tight job market). Also worth noting is this quote, again from the *Oregon Blue Book*,

“Although Oregon has a high minimum wage, workers in Oregon tend to work fewer hours per week and, as a result, average wage earnings are below the national level. Workers at Oregon businesses earned an average of \$759 in weekly earnings in 2013, which is below the national average earnings of \$825 per week.” **So, why aren’t we working to eliminate the roadblocks to more hours per worker?**

With an increase in the minimum wage, farmers, ranchers, producers, packers, restaurant owners, grocers, hotel operators and more businesses will all face increases in the cost of doing business. I fear many of the small business owners will be unable to survive. Others will choose to cut the number of employees leading to more unemployment. And, the cost of doing business will ultimately be passed on to consumers. Hey, maybe we’ll get self-serve gas stations and the price of gas will go down because there will be fewer employees? Ya think?

What about the small cities and the increase in wages for library staff, public works and office employees? They, too, will face tough decisions as city managers work within the confines of a budget. Increasing the minimum wage may also cause an increase in other wages. I mean, if a new hire in an office setting, let’s say a mail room clerk, starts at \$15 per hour, the secretary who has been there for 5 years and is now making \$15 per hour is going to want a raise.

Agriculture is a foundation of Oregon’s economy and her spirit. Think of all those Oregon Trail pioneers who came west to the “Garden of Eden”. They brought their plows, seeds, seedlings, hopes and dreams. Oregon products are enjoyed around the world and sought after because of their high quality. An increase in the minimum wage would drastically affect the agricultural industry, sending producers out of state, and limiting the amount of food grown and brought to packing plants. Just ask Marion County strawberry farmers, or NORPAC, how many tons of berries were not harvested because of a lack of workers, even at the current minimum wage. How many employees were not hired to process the berries? What other hand-picked commodities didn’t get harvested because of the same situation?

Minimum wage jobs are not designed to be a life’s occupation. Minimum wage is not intended to be a living wage. I understand the difficulty families have in trying to survive on minimum wage jobs, often stringing together two or three different jobs all part-time. Minimum wage jobs are designed to be a learning environment, a stepping stone to a better paying, more secure career. Perhaps this legislative body should work on lowering the cost of higher education, job mentoring, entrepreneurship opportunities and encouraging individuals to open their own businesses, creating more jobs. We need to encourage larger businesses to locate within our state, not create barriers with high wages. And, you need to work on the barriers employers currently face so they can offer their employees more hours.

We like to keep Oregon a bit of a secret and keep the places we love to visit off the beaten path. But the leisure and hospitality sectors are an important part of our economy. In addition to restaurants, higher minimum wages will also have a negative impact on hotels/motels, the cute stores tourists love to visit, visitor and information centers, chamber offices, museums and other tourist destinations.

In summation, I believe that an increase in Oregon’s minimum wage would start a domino effect of job layoffs, business closures and business relocations increasing unemployment and reliance on SNAP benefits. An increase in Oregon’s minimum wage will also take the state out of contention for businesses looking to relocate or expand. I urge the 2016 Legislature to defeat these bills and work to defeat any ballot measures which may arise from the initiative process. Oregon doesn’t need more unemployment and a reputation as a business busting state.