

Parties set for tussle over minimum wage

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Minimum wage is likely to be a very, very partisan legislative issue this election year.

"The Republican Party is going to decrease your salary," said Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield. Her solemn warning was aimed at an unidentified waitress who reportedly endorsed Republican gubernatorial candidate John Engler in his five-city campaign swing two days earlier.

"She's using it for political purposes, or she doesn't understand it," said Rep. Lad Stacey, R-Berrien Springs, a restaurant owner. "In the vast majority of eating establishments, waitresses make more than the minimum wage."

"Minimum wage is a floor, your starting wage. It was never meant to be a living wage. People who are any good never stay with minimum wage," Stacey said.

THE HOUSE, on almost a straight party-line vote, gave 64-43 approval last week to H.R. 2924, aimed at lifting the state minimum wage above the federal level. It was supported by 59 Democrats and five Republicans.

Since 1981, the rate has been \$3.35 an hour.

If the bill were to get through the Senate unchanged — unlikely politically — it would set these rates:

- \$3.80 on April 1, 1990.
- \$4.25 on April 1, 1991.
- \$4.65 on April 1, 1991.
- \$5 on April 1, 1993.

Among area lawmakers, only Republican Gerald Law of Plymouth crossed party lines to support the bill on final passage. He took no part in the debate.

"I made a mistake," said Law. "It's so darn noisy in that room I was on the phone with a constituent who was mad about roads. I thought we were voting on a DeLoane (Republican) amendment and voted yes."

'The minimum wage is so low that even if you raise it 50 percent, (many) would still live in poverty.'

— Rep. Maxine Berman
D-Southfield

The house is meeting in a basement of an office building a block away from the Capitol during restoration work.

Democrat James Kosteva had an excused absence for a trip to the Soviet Union.

TWO REPUBLICAN alternatives were shot down by almost the same vote.

One would have raised the minimum wage in two stages instead of four. The other would have lowered the percentage of the minimum

wage paid to waiters and waitresses who receive tips — the so-called "tip credit" — to employers.

House minority leader Paul Hillemonds of Holland taunted Democrats to support Gov. James Blanchard, who doesn't want to raise the minimum wage beyond the \$4.25 federal level.

Hillemonds also said Republicans support Blanchard on such crime measures as no-knock search warrants, an anti-racketeering bill and wiretaps.

THE DUEL was carried on by

Rep. Perry Bullard, D-Ann Arbor, who replied.

"Slung by the reality of not supporting the governor's economic measures, the very able minority leader moves on to police state measures."

"Do we want to add wiretappers when East Germany and Czechoslovakia are laying them off?"

The House erupted in laughter. Many members shouted Blanchard's campaign theme of "jobs, jobs, jobs."

THE SERIOUS side had to do with whether a high minimum wage discourages hiring of the inexperienced.

"The minimum wage is so low that even if you raise it 50 percent, (many) would still live in poverty," said Democrat Berman.

Republican Walter DeLoane of Kentwood called it an economic de-

velopment issue, arguing Michigan's minimum shouldn't top the federal level.

"Absolutely erroneous," replied Democrat Greg Pitoniak of Taylor, a former Wayne County economic development director. "Base jobs are in manufacturing. Spin-off jobs are the minimum wage jobs. Minimum wage jobs are a byproduct of economic development."

Pitoniak said \$46,000 Michigan workers are paid the minimum wage.

Democrat Juanita Watkins of Detroit said that rather than being new workers, many earning the minimum wage formerly held factory jobs.

"Seventy percent are adults. 63 percent are women; 63 percent are heads of households," said Watkins, chair of the House Labor Committee, which reported out the bill.

Panel supports minimum wage hike

AP — A Senate committee has approved business-backed legislation to duplicate in Michigan the federal best in the federal minimum wage.

The bill, approved 5-0 last week by the Human Resources and Senior Citizens Committee, now goes to the full Senate. But it faces a collision with House legislation that offers a bigger wage increase.

The Senate bill, sponsored by Sen. Robert Geake, R-Northville, would raise the current \$3.35-per-hour minimum wage to \$3.80 on April 1 and

to \$4.25 on April 1, 1991.

The bill also would permit an employer to pay a "training wage" of not less than 85 percent of the minimum wage for up to 90 days. And it would increase an employer's "tip credit" — the reduction allowed in the minimum wage for workers who earn tips — from the current 25 percent to 45 percent on April 1 and a maximum of 50 percent on April 1, 1991.

A House committee already has approved a bill to boost the mini-

mum wage to \$5 an hour by April 1, 1993. The current wage, which has not been raised since 1981, would jump to \$3.80 on April 1, to \$4.25 on April 1, 1991, to \$4.65 on April 1, 1992, and to \$5 on April 1, 1993.

"The whole purpose of the bill is to have the state reflect federal policy," Geake said. "I try to keep an open mind on negotiations (with the House)."

Democrats and organized labor generally support the House bill, while business and Republicans gen-

erally back the Senate version. Unions charge that workers have fallen far behind the rate of inflation, while business says the training wage and increased tip credit are necessary economic incentives.

"This legislation is a modest and reasonable step in the increasingly difficult fight to maintain Michigan's traditional role as a leader in providing decent and equitable standards for employers and employees alike," Union Auto Workers vice president Ernest Lofton said of the House version.

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Lane

Len Bias' mother to speak at EMU

Lonise Bias, mother of late basketball star Len Bias, will speak at Eastern Michigan University at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 21, as part of National Collegiate Drug Awareness Week.

Bias, a University of Maryland star and first round draft pick of the Boston Celtics, died in 1986 after a heart attack believed induced by cocaine abuse.

Mentally ill alliance meets

The Oakland County chapter of the Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Michigan meets at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 22, in the Administration Building Auditorium of William Beaumont Hospital, 3601 W. 13 Mile Road, Royal Oak.

The evening is free. Refreshments will be served.

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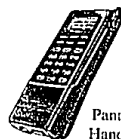
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Thelma: I was extra nervous because I was high-risk, but being at Grace made it

easier. **Patrice:** I was not high-risk but I felt more secure knowing Grace had

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Rita: The staff treated my family, including the kids, like they belonged there.

A Full Range of Options Sherri: I was delighted that the program at Grace

was so extensive. Natural birth, LDR rooms, traditional delivery,

midwives. Grace has almost everything. **Chandra:** It was

very important to have the option of having a midwife. She offered

techniques to make labor easier. **The Wayne State University Affiliation**

Ilene: Because of the affiliation with the medical school, Grace Hospital

is up on all the latest technology.

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