

# Minimum-wage bill clears its final legislative hurdle

■ *Close Senate vote sends measure to governor.*

**By Walter Rubel**

SANTA FE BUREAU CHIEF

SANTA FE — The Senate, on a 22-20 vote Friday night, has taken the final legislative action necessary to increase the state's minimum wage to \$7.50 an hour by the year 2009.

"I think the people of New Mexico are going to be very happy with this state Legislature today for passing the minimum wage," Majority Whip Mary Jane Garcia said. "It was long overdue."

The bill now heads to Gov. Bill Richardson, who had been lobbying legislators for several days to get it passed, and predicted

Friday afternoon that the vote would be close.

He was right. Finance Committee Co-chairmen John Arthur Smith, D-Deming, and Tim Jennings, D-Roswell, joined with all 18 Republicans in voting against the bill. Sens. Linda Lopez, D-Albuquerque, and Mary Kay Papen, D-Las Cruces, cast the deciding votes after having passed on the first time through.

"This is a great day for working New Mexico families," Richardson said. "Raising the minimum wage is the crown jewel of our legislative agenda. Combined, this wage increase and the \$52 million in tax cuts that I signed into law today are a major victory for working New Mexicans."

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# Wage

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The bill will increase the minimum wage from the current \$5.15 an hour to \$6.50 an hour on Jan. 1, 2008 and to \$7.50 on Jan. 1, 2009. It would have exemptions for agricultural workers, and does not include indexing to provide annual increases to keep pace with inflation.

The Senate had passed the bill 35-7 early in the session, but a dispute quickly emerged between the House and Senate on provisions such as indexing and the phase-in dates — issues that doomed the bill last year. Last week, Speaker Ben Lujan, D-Santa Fe, gave in and removed most of the changes.

Still, there was a dispute over local pre-emption, and the Senate held off action on the bill until the final night of the session.

Senate Republicans said Friday they were not necessarily against raising the minimum wage, but objected to House changes. The original Senate bill would have prohibited local increases for five years after passage. The House lowered that to two years.

“You have literally sold us down the river and made it look like we don’t support a minimum-wage increase, and I’m really resentful of that,” alleged Sen. Diane Snyder, R-Albuquerque.

Smith said he thinks a disparity in the minimum wage between Santa Fe and Albuquerque, which have passed local increases, and the rest of the state will damage economic development efforts.

“This was probably a difficult choice for a lot of the members to make. I understand that,” Altamirano said. “It was difficult for me too. Not to have had minimum wage this session, it probably would have ended it for a long time if the federal (minimum-wage) law kicks in.”

A report in 2005 by the advocacy group New Mexico Voices for Children found that New Mexico’s workforce has a larger percentage earning at or below the minimum wage than any other state in the nation. Bill Jordan, deputy director of that agency, said they were pleased with the compromise bill.

“We were afraid for a while that they might not be able to reach an agreement,” Jordan said. “We’re glad that it doesn’t contain a wage increase until the year 21013, and we think we can live with this compromise.”

“We’re also hopeful that we don’t have to wait another nine years for a wage increase, knowing that this legislation does not contain a cost-of-living increase.”

The bill is SB324, and can be found on the Internet at [legis.state.nm.us](http://legis.state.nm.us)

## Yea or nay?

How our senators voted:

▶ **Las Cruces:**

Mary Jane Garcia, yes; Mary Kay Papen, yes; Lee Rawson, no; Cynthia Nava, yes

▶ **Alamogordo-Ruidoso:**

Diana Duran, no; Rod Adair, no; Tim Jennings, no

▶ **Deming:**

John Arthur Smith, no

▶ **Silver City:**

Ben Altamirano, yes

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# Minimum wage legislation moves through Senate

BY WALTER RUBEL  
SANTA FE BUREAU CHIEF

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