

## Minimum wage hike opponents confident despite new polls showing widespread support

By Andrew George November 4, 2013

With polls opening in less than 24 hours, a constitutional amendment to raise the state's minimum wage by \$1 to \$8.25 and tie it to the consumer price index looks likely to pass, according to two new polls released today by Rutgers-Eagleton and Monmouth University.

On Tuesday, voters will get to decide the fate of the amendment through a ballot question. Business groups have been outspoken in their opposition to raising the wage, saying they fear it will hurt the small business community and could potentially force employers to cut jobs.

The Rutgers poll shows that 68 percent of likely voters favor the proposed hike over 30 percent who do not.

The poll did find that due to Republicans becoming increasingly interested in defeating the measure, overall support for the hike has dropped eight points since September. However, poll director and Rutgers professor David Redlaws said support among Democrats and independents remains strong.

"It seems that despite the lack of enthusiasm by Democrats for voting in this election, the minimum wage amendment will pass," Redlaws said in the report. "Almost all Democrats will support it, and enough independents agree to likely put it over the top."

The margin of support for the measure is slightly tighter according to Monmouth's poll, which shows that 58 percent of likely voters plan to vote in favor of raising the wage as opposed to 28 percent opposing it.

Despite the efforts of business groups to showcase why constitutionally tying the consumer price index to the wage could prove troublesome, the Monmouth poll found that just 36 percent of voters said they had given that aspect of the measure a great deal of thought.

"The business community's attempts to warn voters about the potential dangers of locking minimum wage increases into the state constitution have not gained much traction," Monmouth University Polling Institute director Patrick Murray said in the report.

In another report released Saturday by Farleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind Poll, 59 percent of likely voters said they supported raising the proposal. Only 32 percent of voters say they are following the issue closely, the poll found.

PublicMind director and Farleigh Dickinson professor Krista Jenkins said the numbers show that "voters are clearly ready to say yes to mandating a wage increase."

"The minimum wage ballot question has the potential to affect the lives of thousands of Garden State voters," Jenkins said in the report. "With New Jersey not immune from the national trend of job growth in areas that pay the minimum wage, any increase is going to be felt by both employees and employers."

Despite the poll numbers, business groups say their confidence is not wavering.

"I think the message is resonating," says Michael Egenton, senior vice president of government relations for the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce. "I think we're chipping away at the polls."

Egenton said that throughout the day today and into Tuesday, a heavy ground effort is in place through literature distribution and television and radio ads. He said he feels optimistic about the chances of defeating the hike.

"I think our message is getting out there," Egenton said.

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