Minimum Wage Pros and Cons

WASHINGTON (AP) — "Give America a raise!" President Barack Obama implored Congress in his State of the Union address. But it would cost jobs, Republicans warned.

The political divide over raising the federal minimum wage is deep, driven by politics, ideology and demographics. Democrats represent more low-wage workers than Republicans do.

According to the Census Bureau, nearly every congressional district with a large concentration of poor people is represented by a Democrat. There are 40 House districts where at least 20 percent of families live in poverty. Thirty-eight are represented by Democrats. The government defines poverty as an annual income below $11,670 for a single person living alone, and below $23,850 for a family of four.

Of the 100 poorest districts, Democrats represent 73. The Census Bureau says 43 congressional districts have per capita incomes under $20,000 a year. All but 10 are represented by Democrats.

Obama and Democrats in Congress are making a big push to raise the federal minimum wage. It's part of their effort to highlight income inequality, an issue they plan to emphasize in congressional elections this fall. "This will help families," Obama told Congress during his State of the Union Address. "It will give businesses customers with more money to spend."

Obama has endorsed a bill to gradually raise the federal minimum wage from $7.25 an hour to $10.10 by 2016. Senate Democrats are planning votes on a bill, but Republicans are working to block it.

House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, isn't expected to bring the bill to a vote in the House.

"When you raise the price of employment, guess what happens?" Boehner said. "You get less of it."

A recent Associated Press-GfK poll found that 55 percent of Americans support a minimum wage increase, while 21 percent oppose it and 23 percent are neutral. But congressional districts don't always mirror national sentiment.

An analysis by the Congressional Budget Office highlights the political divide:

Democrats touted the finding that increasing the minimum wage would boost earnings for more than 16.5 million people while lifting 900,000 people above the federal poverty level by 2016. Republicans noted that CBO also said employment would be cut by roughly 500,000 jobs.

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