

Minimum wage boost gaining Senate support

By Dan McKay / Journal Staff Writer

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SANTA FE – A minimum-wage proposal moving through the Senate picked up bipartisan support Thursday.

The Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce and some union representatives favor it, too – quite a contrast from a House proposal that's drawn opposition across the political spectrum.

State Sen. Clemente Sanchez, D-Grants, is sponsoring Senate Bill 386, which would boost New Mexico's minimum wage to \$9 an hour, an increase of 20 percent over the \$7.50 level now in the law.

But the proposal also includes some provisions aimed at making it more palatable to businesses.

The bill allows a training wage of \$8 an hour for new employees for up to 60 days, and there's no automatic adjustment that would push the minimum wage up to track with inflation.

Sanchez said his goal was to craft a bill that could win enough support to become law. Democrats control both the House and Senate, but Republican Gov. Susana Martinez could veto their legislation if she believes too big of an increase is proposed.

"I'm really looking at trying to get something past the finish line," Sanchez said.

The bill won a 7-0 recommendation of approval by the Senate Public Affairs Committee on Thursday. It now heads to the Corporations and Transportation Committee, potentially its last stop before hitting the Senate floor.

The bill drew mixed testimony from the audience. Some business and union groups favored it, and others opposed it.

The Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce, for example, supported the bill, while the New Mexico Business Coalition opposed it.

Terri Cole, the chamber's president and CEO, described the bill as a "reasonable" attempt at compromise, even if the higher minimum wage would be an adjustment for some businesses.

An attempt at compromise on the House side, meanwhile, is uniting liberal and conservative groups alike in opposition.

That bill – whose five Democratic co-sponsors include House Speaker Brian Egolf of Santa Fe – would boost New Mexico's minimum wage to \$9.25 an hour. It also would prohibit cities and counties from adopting laws that regulate how private employers can schedule their workers.

Conservative groups don't like the first provision, while liberals don't like the latter.

House Bill 442 cleared one committee on a party-line vote and is awaiting action in another.