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## **Governor favors state minimum wage hike**

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Count Gov. Janet Napolitano as a "yes" vote if a proposal to create a state minimum wage gets on the ballot.

The Democratic governor, who's generally reluctant to endorse ballot issues, didn't hesitate when asked Wednesday how she felt about the proposal to create a minimum wage of \$6.75 an hour.

"We haven't had a minimum wage hike in a long time," Napolitano said during her weekly press briefing. "It's very interesting how popular it is. People recognize that when you work, you have to make enough to live on. I hope it gets on the ballot."

Organizers of the Arizona Minimum Wage Coalition were elated to pick up what they said was an unsolicited endorsement.

"We're ecstatic," said Rebekeh Friend, the coalition's chairwoman. "The governor has always been supportive of hard-working people and we're ecstatic."

Friend said the coalition is halfway toward its goal of collecting 122,612 valid signatures to qualify for the November ballot.

Backed by labor groups, progressive organizations and grassroots activists, the coalition proposes establishment of a state minimum wage of \$6.75. It would be adjusted annually to keep pace with the Consumer Price Index.

Arizona is one of six states without a minimum wage, so it follows the federal minimum of \$5.15 an hour.

The proposal is certain to face opposition from business groups, which feel that the market - not state laws - should determine the salary threshold.

"We know it will be an uphill battle," said Farrell Quinlan, a spokesman for the Arizona Chamber of Commerce and Industry. "Establishing a state minimum wage higher than the federal wage will actually hurt job creation and the very people it's supposed to help, the entry-level workers."

However, he acknowledged the issue is popular, at least at first blush, with voters.

A poll released Wednesday underscored that point.

The Grand Canyon State Poll, conducted by the Social Research Laboratory at Northern Arizona University, found 81 percent support for a minimum-wage drive. Of the 527 Arizonans polled, 62 percent strongly backed the move, while only 9 percent strongly opposed it. That makes the issue more of a consensus issue than a wedge issue, said pollster Fred Solop.

"That's a very safe issue for the state," he said. "It looks like it's well on its way to passing."

Minimum-wage drives have been cropping up on ballots in recent years. In 2004, minimum-wage efforts, often cast as "living-wage" issues, won in the Republican-leaning states of Florida and Nevada.

That has led some political observers to say that Democrats could gain traction by identifying with the wage issue and casting it in the moral context of providing a living wage for workers.

A similar minimum-wage effort by Democratic state lawmakers is going nowhere in the Legislature for the fourth straight year. Sponsor Rep. Steve Gallardo, D-Phoenix, said this is the last attempt Democrats will make to get changes through legislation, and will instead back the ballot effort.

Bob Grossfeld, who is running the Arizona Minimum Wage Coalition campaign, said Napolitano's support is a big boost to the campaign.

"I don't think that there's any question that support from one of the most popular governors in Arizona's recent history would be anything less than a great thing to happen," Grossfeld said.

But, the Democratic pollster and strategist said, the issue will advance on its own merits.

"When was the last time you tried to live on \$5.15 an hour?" he asked. "The question is really whether Arizonans value work the way we always say we value work."

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