



The big debate

Should the US minimum wage be raised?

Many people believe that a pay raise is overdue, but others disagree.

What you need to know

- A minimum wage is the lowest hourly rate an employer can pay a worker. In the US, it's currently \$7.25 and was last raised in 2009.
- State and local leaders can choose to set a higher minimum wage instead, and a total of 34 states, territories, and districts have done so.
- A 2024 report found that 82,000 people in the US made the \$7.25 federal minimum wage.
- Polls show most Americans support raising the US minimum wage to \$15.

DID YOU KNOW?
The first nationwide minimum wage in the US was established in 1938 and set at 25 cents an hour.



The start of a new year often comes with raises for employees, and in 2026, the minimum wage workers can be paid will increase in 19 states. For the US as a whole, however, the federal minimum wage has not been raised in more than a decade. Many people have called for an increase to the national minimum wage, and a bill to accomplish that was introduced into Congress (the branch of government that makes laws) in 2025. Some people are not in favor of this, though, and argue that increasing the minimum wage would do more harm than good. What do you think? Should the US minimum wage be raised?

Yes—it helps everyone

People who are paid the minimum wage often struggle to pay for basic needs, like groceries and housing. Increasing their pay would greatly improve their lives. While the national minimum wage has stayed the same for many years, inflation (the rate of increase in the cost of goods and services) has increased. That means life is even harder for people making minimum wage now than it was in the past. Plus, the more people are paid, the more they are able to spend on goods and services. That money goes back into businesses and the economy. This benefits everyone.

No—it's not worth the cost

If companies that rely on minimum wage workers have to start paying them more, they will face higher expenses and lower profits. This is especially true for small businesses, and many would end up eliminating jobs to offset the pay increases. Businesses would likely also have to raise the cost of their products, meaning that all US consumers would have to spend more to afford the basics. Besides, it doesn't make sense for the federal government to set wages for states and cities that have very different costs of living. Local governments know what's best for the residents and workers in their communities.

YES

Three reasons the US minimum wage should be raised

- 1 It would benefit the Americans who struggle to afford food and housing.
- 2 The cost of living has risen, so it only makes sense that the minimum wage should also increase to keep pace.
- 3 Higher pay enables people to spend more, which sends more money flowing through the US economy.

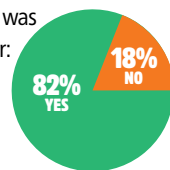
NO

Three reasons the US minimum wage should not be raised

- 1 Some employers wouldn't be able to afford higher pay and would have to lay off workers.
- 2 Companies would wind up raising prices, which would affect all consumers.
- 3 One minimum wage for the whole country doesn't make sense. State and local governments should set it.

OUR PREVIOUS POLL

In Issue 296, we asked you if hot chocolate is better than chocolate milk. The toasty drink for chilly days was a clear winner: 82% of you said yes, and 18% said no.



What do you think?

Now that you've read a bit more about this issue, visit kids.theweekjunior.com/polls so you can vote in our debate. Vote **YES** if you think the US minimum wage should be raised or **NO** if you don't. We'll publish the results next week.

The goal of the big debate is to present two sides of an issue fairly in order to stimulate discussion and allow our readers to make up their minds. The views on this page do not reflect those of *The Week Junior*, and the page is not funded by third parties.