

Consult the Cat

by Shannon Roy, Editor

Connie Doeden, Director of the Eureka Library, sent the following question: The U.S. House of Representatives has voted to increase the minimum wage to \$7.25. Can you please explain how this will impact Kansas librarians?



The Cat has repeatedly insisted that she needs very little – only the best food, the heaviest cream, the warmest cushions and the best books. But voluntary simplicity hasn't solved financial problems for quite some time. As House Education and Labor Committee Chair George Miller points out: "...the gas prices are higher, the education prices are higher, the medical costs are higher." Americans working at or near the federal minimum wage definitely need an increase.

The U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved the first increase in the federal minimum wage in nearly a decade on Wednesday, January 10th. If the measure becomes law, it will boost the minimum wage from \$5.15 an hour to \$7.25 an hour over the next two years. The U.S. Senate has not voted on the legislation yet, though they have voted down an amendment to raise the federal wage in all states, even those who have wage floors higher than the federal base.

If the proposed legislation does become law, the minimum wage would jump to \$5.85 within 60 days of enactment. One year later, the wage would rise to \$6.55. It would reach \$7.25 a year after that.

If an increase in the minimum wage is enacted at some point, Kansas library administrations will be legally obligated to pay the new minimum wage levels to both full-time and part-time staff as soon as they become law. Since there is renewed interest in this important issue, Kansas librarians should start planning for potential new minimum wage levels. However, there is no way to tell exactly when these increases will take effect or how the new legislation will mesh with the fiscal years that Kansas libraries are budgeting within. Kansas communities will vary a great deal in how much the new law will impact them and how easy it will be to provide the additional wages for library personnel.

A library administration or library board of trustees that faces an unavoidable delay in complying with a newly set minimum wage should present a plan to the staff that indicates exactly what actions will be taken and when. The plan should confirm that the library does intend to comply with the law as soon as

possible.

While a new minimum wage would be the law of the land, the renewed interest in compensation is also an excellent opportunity to market the fact that library wages have often been too low to retain the personnel that have the specialized knowledge, technology skills and commitment to continuous learning that are now absolutely necessary in a viable library of any size.

The Cat has deep sympathy with the financial problems that most libraries face. It is not easy to offer excellent service to the public and a good work environment for the staff. Those who continue to work for better compensation certainly deserve a purr from the

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