

Group calls for minimum wage raise

HEALTH

By Drew Kerr
The Gazette

IOWA CITY — An Iowa research group said Wednesday increasing Iowa's minimum wage \$1 to \$6.15 per hour would help about 53,000 working Iowans earn another 37 cents per hour on average.

That could restore spending power those workers have lost to inflation, members of the Iowa Policy Project said here at a news conference.

The Mount Vernon-based group released a report it says backs its assertion. The report says 257,000 Iowa workers would gain an average 60 cents per hour if the minimum hourly wage was \$7.25.

Tax credits or exemptions should

Wal-Mart health care law overturned in Maryland

BALTIMORE (AP) — A first-of-its-kind state law that would have required Wal-Mart to spend more on employee health care in Maryland is invalid under federal law, a judge ruled Wednesday.

for its Maryland employees in a different way from how it keeps track of employee benefits in other states. Motz wrote that the law "imposes legally cognizable injury upon Wal-Mart."

Motz cited the federal Em-

be coupled with a boost in the minimum wage, policy group members said.

The group estimates that increasing the minimum wage to \$7.25 would mean a single worker providing for a two-person family would earn \$14,500 annually, putting the family just above the poverty line. Boosting the minimum wage in Iowa would help women over the age of 20 the most, the group's report said.

"There is pressure building on this from both sides of the aisle," the report's author, Elaine Ditsler of Iowa City, said about increasing Iowa's minimum wage. "We think it has to happen sooner or later. Hopefully sooner."

The group relied on the Economic

Policy Institute, of Washington, D.C., and new census survey data, to reach its conclusions.

The federal minimum wage, \$5.15 per hour, has remained unchanged since 1997. Twenty-three states, including neighboring Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota, have increased the minimum in their states, the Associated Press reported this week. Iowa lawmakers debated an increase this year, but the effort failed.

House Speaker Christopher Rants, R-St. Louis City, said he is open to debating the minimum wage but would want to include ways the state could ease costs on business owners to compensate for the change. "We don't want this to create layoffs," he

said. "When that happens there is no wages to talk about."

The National Federation of Independent Business opposes a minimum wage increase. "Whenever government starts instructing business how to run that's not a good situation," Andy Warren, the federation's Iowa state director.

But Peter Fisher, research director for The Iowa Policy Project, said employers could benefit from increased productivity if wages were boosted. "Employees are a lot less apt to be treated as disposable cogs," he said.

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New home construction slows



Food companies lure kids with online games

WASHINGTON (AP) — When they play Chips Ahoy Junior Soccer Shootout and Pop-Tart Slalom, kids aren't just having fun. They also are subjects in marketing efforts to sell food, a study finds.

The Kaiser Family Foundation's report did not pass judgment on such online "advergaming." But at a forum Wednesday, it did lead to a confrontation on the food industry's role in childhood obesity.

"Overwhelmingly, almost exclusively, the Web sites you are looking at are for foods that are of poor nutritional quality," said Margo G. Wootan, director of nutrition at the Center for Science in the Public Interest, an advocacy group.

An industry executive said food companies have developed thousands of healthier products. For example, McDonald's led the nation in apple sales last year, said Daniel Jaffe, executive vice