

TV RADIO CLASSICAL KIDS ARTS FOOD SUPPORT

SPECIAL FOCUS:

[BPR](#)[Greater Boston](#)[Innovation Hub](#)[On Campus](#)[MassPoliticsProfs](#)[The Scrum](#)[DONATE](#)[LISTEN NOW](#)[Under the Radar](#)[Basic Black](#)[NE Center for Investigative Reporting](#)[The Trial of Dzhokhar Isarnaev](#)

Local News

6:00 PM MON MARCH 23, 2015

Minimum Wage In Mass. Is Rising — But Can You Live On It?

By STEPHANIE LEYDON



http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/demowgbh/files/201503/Screen_Shot_2015-03-23_at_10.28.17_AM.png

Kathy Brown's nametag hangs from her Shaw's work uniform.

imagine this," she said.

Even as the labor market looks up, Kathy remains downsized, unable to find a job in her profession. She worked for 25 years in film and television production.



http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/demowgbh/files/201503/Screen_Shot_2015-03-23_at_10.28.43_AM.png

Kathy Brown

When Kathy Brown needs to get somewhere, she walks. Bundled in a dark parka and wearing a bright pink backpack, she has weathered this winter on foot.

Brown has no car and lives at her brother's home in Foxboro because she can't afford rent. She considers things like cheese and eggs a luxury. This is not the life Brown, 57, anticipated.

"Back when I was working in Milwaukee, working in my career field, I couldn't even

Now she bags groceries at Shaw's for minimum wage. She — and more than a quarter of a million workers — got a pay hike this January when the Massachusetts' minimum wage went from \$8 to \$9 per hour. The rate will continue to climb a dollar a year, until it hits \$11 an hour in 2017.

"It's gone up by, I think, 80 cents — and does that make a difference? No, not really," she said, laughing. "No, \$9 an hour, no one can make it, that's not a living wage."

Janet Boguslaw, senior scientist at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, says since 1938, when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt first signed it into law, the real value of the minimum wage has dropped dramatically.

"Originally, the minimum wage was established so it would help provide a baseline for people," Boguslaw said. "If it had continued to be indexed to the cost of living it would really be around \$18 now. So part of the whole effort to get the minimum wage raised is to get it back to what it was, which was to keep people out of poverty."

But in Reading, at a time when Main Street struggles to compete with online and big box retailers, small business owners say even a modest hike in minimum wage cuts into already tight profit margins.

"For the business owner, it becomes why hire people?" said Erin Calvo-Bacci, who owns the Chocolate Truffle in Reading Center, a corner shop filled with trays of hand crafted chocolates. "Why create new jobs? I'll just take the shifts myself. As a retail advocate and small business owner I want to see our Main Streets thriving."



But she says she's considering closing shop and selling her chocolates online only.

"We want to keep small businesses in business," Boguslaw said.

Overall, Boguslaw says research indicates that minimum wage hikes help retailers because workers have more money to spend.

http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/demowgbh/files/201503/Screen_Shot_2015-03-23_at_10.24.26_AM.png

The Chocolate Truffle in Reading.

"There may be an individual instance of mom-and-pop stores working so on the margin that they can't stay in business, but

in the aggregate, if you raise the minimum wage, the overall society is going to benefit," she said.

Calvo-Bacci disagrees. She says the jobs she offers are entry-level, not intended to provide a long-term living.

"You get experience in retail, you're able to move up, or you move on — and isn't that what our American dream is supposed to be about?" she said. "Earning more, achieving more — I don't believe in, 'Here it was, we're told you're going to get this salary and that's what you're going to get for the rest of your life.' Where's the drive in that?"

Brown says she is driven to find a better-paying job, but — after years of searching, has had no luck.

"I don't think the Commonwealth sees it, I don't think the federal government sees it, that right here are a lot of people who are forced to live on the minimum wage," she said.

Which, in Massachusetts, is going up. But, for Kathy, not enough to make the road ahead much easier.

See the story on Greater Boston:



TAGS: [Economy \(/term/economy\)](#)

Related Content:



Local News
[Massachusetts' Unemployment Rate Fell Below 5% In Snowy February](#)



UNDER THE RADAR
[John Barros Spins Boston Olympics, Dudley Square](#)

RELATED PROGRAM

- [Greater Boston \(/programs/greater-boston\)](#)

0 Comments

WGBH News

Login ▾

Recommend

Share

Sort by Best ▾



Start the discussion...

Be the first to comment.

ALSO ON WGBH NEWS

WHAT'S THIS?

Future Of Mass. Gaming, Marathon Bombing Trial & Combatting ...

3 comments • 4 days ago

Vandermeer — Jim, You are the best... terrific interview... you are always prepared with facts on the situation ...

Tsarnaev Trial, College Safe Spaces & Greater Bostonian

3 comments • 5 days ago

David Donchek — Thank you, thank you Emily Rooney and Adam Reilly. Without cameras in the courtroom, ...

Boston 2024 Coverage Too Negative? Trial By Tweet, Words ...

8 comments • 3 days ago

henrietta11 — I appreciate the recent critical and skeptical coverage of Olympics 2024 in the Globe.Scott ...

Bikers Applaud, Merchants Worry As Boston Plans To Install Cycle ...

4 comments • 4 days ago

Steven — Where do they put the snow on that diagram?

Subscribe

Add Disqus to your site

Privacy