Support for Florida's minimum wage measure may not translate into Election Day votes

by John Hajughey, The Center Square | October 29, 2020 12:01 PM

With Election Day less than a week away and about half of Florida's 14.4 million voters already casting ballots via mail or at early voting sites, a new poll suggests flagging support for a proposed constitutional amendment to raise the state's minimum wage to $15 by 2026.

According to a Florida Atlantic University Business and Economics Polling Initiative survey of 937 likely voters from Oct. 24-25, 62% still support Amendment 2, a majority that would surpass the 60% threshold necessary to amend the Florida Constitution.

Surveys earlier this year indicated the proposal would pass overwhelmingly, with around 68% to 72% of the vote. Those poll numbers have declined gradually since September, however.

According to a St. Pete Polls' survey of 2,906 voters from Sept. 31-22, 65% said they'd vote for the measure. In a University of Northern Florida (UNF) Public Opinion Research Lab poll of 3,000 voters from Oct. 1-4, 60% said they'd vote "yes."

"Typically, ballot measures do better prior to the election than they actually do on election day," UNF's Dr. Michael Binder said. "I would expect that number to come down a little bit."

Florida for a Fair Wage's Amendment 2 calls for raising the state's minimum wage from $8.46 an hour to $10 an hour in September 2023 with $1-an-hour increases annually until it reaches $15 in 2026.

Florida for a Fair Wage is led by John Morgan, a prominent Orlando trial attorney who also spearheaded the 2016 measure that legalized medical marijuana. His firm and the SEIU Florida labor union have contributed nearly all of the $3.63 million in campaign contributions to support the measure.

Amendment 2 is opposed by Save Florida Jobs, created by the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association (FRLA). It has raised $605,746 to contest the measure, citing studies that say it would be a disaster for the state's economy. Among them:

- An analysis by Drs. William Even of Miami University and David Macpherson of Trinity University that projects Florida's hospitality industry would shed 181,000 jobs if the measure is passed.

- A Florida TaxWatch study from September that said the measure would create "winners and losers."

- State economists, in their fiscal analysis of Amendment 2, said adoption would cost state and local governments $16 million in 2022 and $540 million by 2027.

- FRLA's minimum wage calculator showed the measure could double some restaurants' payrolls.

Save Florida Jobs has been joined by a relatively new opposition group, Amendment 2 Hurts You, whose members challenged Morgan last week during a video debate hosted by Florida Tiger Bay Clubs.

Morgan argued business opposition is justifying "slave wages" to protect profits.

"What Amendment 2 does is to try to lift the working poor out of poverty and reward them for a hard day's work," Morgan said, adding he believes income inequality is the nation's biggest underlying source of friction.

"First of all, we all know that this country is divided from all walks of life, the Bernie bros, the Trump voters, and everything in between," Morgan said. "Underneath that, I believe the anger emanates from income inequality at $8.56 an hour. This is not a political vote; this is a vote of morality and compassion."

J.T. Corrales, a Tampa Bay restaurateur, agreed it is not a political vote. For restaurant owners and tipped workers, it's a pocketbook vote, he said.

"People will lose hours. People will lose jobs. Our prices will go up, or a combination of both. It's inevitable," he said.

With higher wages come higher prices, Corrales said, which would affect fixed-income seniors who constitute 20% of Florida's population.