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Minimum wage legislation will hurt Central Valley

Posted: Thursday, April 7, 2016 8:36 am

BY ADAM GRAY/ASSEMBLY MEMBER

Assemblymember Adam C. Gray (D-Merced) released the following statement in reaction to the Legislature's approval of SB 3 to raise the minimum wage to $15 per hour with automatic spending every year after:

In January, the governor promised fiscal responsibility and to live within our means. The governor wisely stated at that time that we must heed history's warning that surpluses are always nearly followed by years of shortfalls. The governor stated that additional permanent spending commitments, however noble, would return our state to the years of multi-billion dollar deficits.

Senate Bill 3 will automatically spend multi-billions of dollars every year out of our state's general fund.

Improving the lives of my constituents is my top priority, which is why I have supported previous increases to the state's minimum wage as long as the increase did not contain an auto-pilot spending mechanism. Unfortunately, SB 3 contains an auto-pilot spending provision which will cost the general fund at least $4 billion per year.

This spending commitment is being made at the same time that we just learned the High-Speed Rail Authority is planning to break its long-term commitment to include Merced and the Northern Central Valley because the cost is a one-time $1 billion.

But perhaps even more concerning is the impact this bill will have in places like Merced that still have double-digit unemployment. We live in a part of the state where people want to work, to earn an honest day's wages, and simply cannot find a job.

The reality is that in some areas of the state, $15 may not be high enough. But in other areas, like Merced, we will suffer. I honestly don't know how we will pay for these massive new costs. We do not have the Fortune 500 companies in the Central Valley. We have small businesses, family farms, and so many hard-working Californians striving for a better life. And when the rents and cost of living begin to reflect those in the big cities, my constituents will have no choice but to uproot their families and leave. They will be priced out of the state, just like the thousands who have been priced out of the Bay Area and LA. That is why I voted no on SB 3.

Assemblymember Adam C. Gray represents the 21st Assembly District which includes all of Merced County and portions of Stanislaus County.

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