

## Erica Hansen - SeaKing WDC Opinion in Seattle Times: Minimum wage does not address skills gap

---

**From:** Marina Parr  
**To:** LEADERSHIP-TEAM  
**Date:** 4/16/2014 10:41 AM  
**Subject:** SeaKing WDC Opinion in Seattle Times: Minimum wage does not address skills gap  
**CC:** Dave Wallace; Erica Hansen; LEG-TEAM; Lindsay Elwanger; Martin McCallum; Mike Brennan; Terri Colbert

---

## Guest: A \$15 minimum wage would not address the skills gap

The minimum wage debate is not just about a higher wage figure, writes guest columnist Marlana Sessions.

By [Marlana Sessions](#)

April 15, 2014

Special to The Times



Marlana Sessions

ACROSS the Seattle region and across the land, there is great civic dialogue and action toward raising the minimum wage. Bravo to that.

Finding the right minimum for the minimum wage gets complex very quickly when one looks at the issue holistically. It's not just about a higher wage figure, nor is there a one-size-fits-all minimum figure.

As individuals seek to move up career paths and gain skills to meet the needs of employers in real time, it's important to recognize that each individual and family situation will require a different approach.

What a laid-off midcareer professional in the financial services or manufacturing industry might need for a career change and training is different from a 16-year-old looking for a first summer job.

Likewise, a single mother or father with young children living on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) may have a longer route to making self-sufficient wages and getting off public assistance than a mature worker who wants to supplement his or her retirement income.

Raising wages without considering the next job and a worker's ability to move up into the discussion would only bring people to a stopping point in their careers. It would not serve industry today or in the future.

Our region's ability to compete would decline if we don't recognize the changing needs of our industries. Training current and future workers continues to be a cost issue. The manufacturing, health-care, technology and maritime industries in our region struggle with a skills gap between the jobs they are hiring for and the skills job applicants bring. This is a significant cost issue for employers.

The area's Workforce Development System is stepping up to respond. King County's 11 community and technical colleges and institutes have been nimble in compressing and creating curricula in tune with industry needs. The Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County offers labor market information in [Map Your Career](#) and in Talent Pipeline Studies.

Based on what the council has observed, there is an appropriate wage benchmark that can help anyone understand what wages job seekers need to be self-sufficient.

The [Self-Sufficiency Calculator](#), launched statewide by the council in 2007, has allowed us to measure our effectiveness in helping customers improve their families' economic well-being.

For example, in 2011, a single adult raising an infant and preschooler who paid \$1,179 a month for housing, \$1,980 for child care and had to cover other basic expenses, such as food and transportation, would have had to earn \$29.68 an hour to have been considered self-sufficient in Seattle, according to the calculator.

Nearly 60 percent of Seattle-King County job seekers served by our council's WorkSource system who started out below the self-sufficiency threshold were placed in jobs at or above self-sufficiency.

The council applauds our local, state and federal government officials, and labor, business and community leaders for tackling the issue of higher wages for all.

However, dialogue and action are incomplete unless self-sufficiency and skill-building, in tune with industry needs today and in the future, are incorporated into the discourse. The future of our workforce and our competitive edge in the Puget Sound region depend on it.

*Marlena Sessions is CEO of the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County*