

Edwards urges N.J. minimum wage hike

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TRENTON — Former Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards stopped in New Jersey on Friday as part of his push to combat poverty by raising the minimum wage.

Edwards was in Newark as part of his anti-poverty campaign, known as "Half in Ten." He's working to reduce poverty in the U.S. by 50 percent in the next decade.

He urged New Jersey lawmakers to raise the state's current hourly rate from \$7.15 to \$8.50, saying the move could help lift thousands of working poor into the middle class.

"This is the cause of my life, I'm going to fight for it with everything I've got," Edwards said at a news conference. "I think in a country as great as America, we can do something about 37 million of our own people who wake up every day worried about surviving."

In addition to wage increases, the "Half in Ten" group is pushing for an expansion of earned income tax credits, child care and health insurance programs.

New Jersey currently has the nation's 13th highest minimum wage, but is among the most expensive states to live.

According to the Raise the Wage campaign, the current minimum wage is not enough to keep a family of three subsisting above the federal poverty line of \$17,600 a year.

New Jersey Lawmakers entered their summer recess without acting on a proposal from a state commission to boost the minimum wage to \$8.25 per hour, which would have made it the highest in the nation.

Opponents of the proposed increase say it's too costly, especially for small business owners.

"Employers are struggling to keep workers during these uncertain economic times and the

situation is not improving in the near term," said Kevin Friedlander of the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce. "Now is not the time for the minimum wage to be raised."

Edwards, 55, has been mentioned as a possible running mate for Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama. On Friday, he reiterated his support of the Illinois senator but denied that he had aspirations to run for vice president again.

"I'm not seeking it, I don't expect to be asked," Edwards said. "But anything Sen. Obama asked me to do in his campaign or in his presidency, of course I'd take very seriously."

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