

It won't be easy, but new overtime rules are necessary

Anthony Kuipers/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

The new overtime rule the Obama administration ushered in last week is a long time coming.

Beginning Dec. 1, most workers will have to be paid \$47,500 or more before companies can declare them exempt from overtime pay. That's twice as high as today.

According to Vice President Joe Biden, 60 percent of salaried workers qualified for overtime in 1975 based on their income. That number has dropped to 7 percent.

It will take a lot of figuring out, as employers sift through the new rules and determine whether to reduce hours, switch salaried workers to hourly or go ahead and pay the time-and-a-half wages for those who work more than 40 hours.

The Daily News will certainly be affected. The two universities in the area may see the biggest effects on their budgets for staff, if not faculty.

The Labor Department estimates this rule will qualify 4.2 million more workers for overtime pay. A map created by the Labor Department shows the new rule will affect about 76,000 workers in Washington and 20,000 in Idaho.

Early indications are that this will be of great help to low-level professionals and managers who work long hours but are paid a flat salary that only slightly exceeds the hourly workers they supervise who get overtime.

The idea, at least according to the White House, is that if the new rule forces employers to reduce their workers' hours, that will lead to more consistent work schedules. If they do allow the employees to work overtime, then employees will be getting fair compensation.

And that's the point. Too many employees are working 60 hours a week and being paid for 40. Those with greater responsibilities than their co-workers don't have the paychecks to show for it.

It may become a headache for business owners. But as we watch the middle class and the national median wages shrink, especially in metro areas, it makes sense why the White House took initiative on this issue.

Too many Americans go to work feeling undervalued.

Time will tell if this will all work out as smoothly and fairly as the administration hopes. Even if it doesn't, we can all hope the extra headaches make for a happier, more valued workforce.