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Prevailing Wages

Introduction

The U.S. Congress passed the Davis-Bacon Act in 1931 during the Great Depression. According to this act, a law was implemented that required governmental contractors to pay 'prevailing wages' on projects that it took on behalf of the federal government. The effect of this legislation was that more than 40 states adopted the 'little Davis-Bacon Acts' or 'prevailing wage' laws. This was then, but later on, many states repealed these statutes. Still, many states today, including Michigan, carry on with such laws that seem to have become obsolete from those Depression-days (Vedder 1997). This paper shall attempt to take a closer look as to what the implications of implementing such laws are, with scrutiny of these laws as enacted in the state of Michigan. Various statistics shall be presented to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of using such laws in a state. The paper shall discuss the various issues that Michigan has faced in regards to these laws and will come up with some solutions and recommendations for the state of Michigan on whether it should continue to implement these rules or repeal from them.

Many jurisdictions, including that of the federal government, set the prevailing wages exactly at or very near to those that are demanded by the laborers according to the union-scale. "Prevailing wage laws, then, force contractors on government construction or other projects to pay their employees at the same rate as unionized members of the relevant occupation—whether it be bricklayers, carpenters, electricians, or other categories of workers—even if non-union contractors could perform the same work less expensively by paying their workers lower but mutually agreed-upon wages" (Vedder 1997). The governments usually use a very complex and intricate method to set these prevailing wages, "but because of the large number of distinct

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