

Lowest-paid employees would be assured pay for overtime

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worked.

Those earning less than \$425 a week, or the equivalent of \$10.63 an hour, would be guaranteed time-and-a-half pay for work beyond 40 hours a week — even if they are otherwise exempt from the wage-and-hour rules.

“You might be surprised” by how many people in managerial, professional or administrative jobs make as little as \$425 a week, said Victoria Lipnic, the Labor Department’s assistant secretary for employment standards and a key figure in working out the new rules.

As an example, she cited “someone like an assistant manager who works in the retail industry or the food industry who is salaried and makes, say, \$15,000 a year.”

The likely effect of both rule changes on the Central Florida economy — or on many individuals here, for that matter — is still highly uncertain. But blue-collar workers would see no difference.

People who perform manual labor — factory workers, mechanics, tradesmen and the like — would continue to be paid hourly wages and have an iron-clad right to time-and-a-half pay after 40 hours a week, Lipnic said.

So, Central Florida’s disproportionately large share of low-wage service workers, such as hotel maids, rental-car cleaners and many restaurant workers,

would continue to be paid hourly wages and receive the law’s wage-and-hour protections, including overtime pay.

Other, higher-paid workers whose jobs would be shifted to “exempt” status, still might keep their overtime under the terms of a union contract. Or it might simply be difficult for an employer to break the custom of paying certain workers an hourly wage, including overtime, even when federal regulations permit it.

“We don’t know what the effect on Central Florida is unless we know how many people are affected and what proportion of their income comes from overtime,” said David Scott, an economist and professor of finance at the University of Central Florida.

“My guess is, economically, it is not a big aggregate effect. But there are certainly going to be families who will feel it. . . . If it affects you, it’s a big deal.”

Scott conceded he had not carefully examined the proposed rules’ local effect and doubts others have yet.

“Right now, I don’t think anybody could — unless they have a month or two to study it — come up with an answer” to the changes’ likely effect in the Orlando area, Scott said.

At Walt Disney World — by far the biggest employer in Central Florida — company spokeswoman Rena Langley said: “This proposal would not impact our business in any way.”

However, Disney’s local work force is highly diverse, with jobs

at all levels of maintenance, hotels, restaurants, retail, engineering, planning, accounting and entertainment.

An economist at the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, Jared Bernstein, was skeptical about Disney’s expected immunity from rules changes.

“There’s absolutely no reason to take that seriously, especially because of how diverse their work force is,” Bernstein said. For one thing, the protections of a union contract could disappear once current contracts are renegotiated, he said.

Projections of how the rules would change workers’ status are vague and vary widely in part because the government’s proposals would likely play out in different ways, depending on the workplace.