**Connecticut’s Recovering Restaurant Industry**

**Needs Support, Not More Government Roadblocks**

The indelible nature of the American Dream was on display earlier this week, when some 1,400 hospitality professionals from throughout the state gathered for a celebration of entrepreneurship, ingenuity, and grit that characterizes an industry that has faced its share of challenges over the last few years.

It was the Connecticut Restaurant Association’s marquee awards ceremony, which saw restauranteurs and workers take honors for their craft and dedication to an industry that accounts for roughly 10 percent of Connecticut jobs.

Yet as this deserved evening celebration took place, a situation familiar to small business owners at the event brewed elsewhere—a cadre of state lawmakers prepped for a morning news conference to announce a fresh assault on the restaurant industry. State Sen. Julie Kushner, of Danbury, told the media she’ll again pursue legislation to eliminate the tip wage credit for waitstaff.

This policy change, which Labor Committee Co-Chairman Kushner failed to advance last session, would increase costs for small business owners, lead to higher customer prices, and pave the way for **elimination** of waitstaff tipping.  It’s frustrating news for an industry hobbled by inflationary costs, stubborn workforce shortages, and government shutdowns that crippled customer traffic.

In our state, certain employers are allowed to pay less than the minimum wage because they can count servers’ tip earnings toward the satisfaction of minimum wage requirements. In exchange, the employer can’t exert any control over tips. If all workers received minimum wage, as Sen. Kushner and some Democrats propose, restaurants could then control the distribution of these tips or even keep them entirely to pay for their overhead operations. It’s a scenario most **wait staff and restaurants** want to avoid.

If the tip credit is eliminated, each one dollar increase in the required wage would cause a 6.1 percent decrease in employment and a 5.6 percent decrease in employees’ earnings, according to a University of California–Irvine study. That could mean the loss of nearly 2,200 tipped jobs and $8 million in worker earnings**.  In fact, t**he concept fell apart a few years ago in Maine, where the policy was quickly repealed after it was enacted due to its dramatic negative impact on workers.

Fact is, Connecticut’s restaurant employment structure provides opportunity for residents to earn a living or extra income in a flexible working environment that almost always provides more than minimum wage alone.

When my wife left teaching to raise our children, the stress of one-income living came quickly. She decided to spend a few weekend nights a month waitressing, earning more money than she did as a full-time teacher. Today, my daughter, a college student with a goal of becoming a doctor, is training as a waitress and bartender to create a pathway to pay for tuition over the next decade.

It’s the type of American experience ignored by Connecticut Democrats, who, rather than appreciating the opportunity offered by our state and country, resort to demonizing those they view as mere speedbumps on the path to meeting their goals set by agitators in California, Chicago, or some other progressive haven that’s disconnected from our Main Streets.

Sen. Kushner’s latest broadside at our restaurant industry represents an inflection point for Governor Lamont. I presume he left the ceremony feeling as I did—appreciating the awesome diversity of the bold entrepreneurs and enthusiastic workers who are trying to build futures in Connecticut.I hope the Governor, and even my Democratic colleagues in the legislature, will join me in rejecting this proposal because our restaurant industry, and the workers who currently thrive within it, exemplify the success stories that still embody the American dream.

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