

Trupti Patel:

My name is Trupti Patel and I happen to be a bartender that is also the candidate for the Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A03. Before entering the service industry, I unfortunately admit, that I held the prejudices and biases associated with the industry, this isn't a real job, this something you do until you get that real job etc. The hospitality industry would become my primary source of income when my father was diagnosed with stage 4 brain cancer.

In an instant my mid-level management career ground to a halt with finding a source of income that would provide the number one priority of flexibility. The harsh reality and ugly truth was I needed a "job" that would allow me to leave with little to no consequences, minimal responsibility and the ability to get hired instantly.

I'd learn quickly that this wasn't some "job", but an occupation people created a life with, performed the duties with pride and dignity only to have no appreciation, recognition, or gratitude for the work done. Those prejudices and biases I fell prey too would rear it's ugly head as a way for people to justify their disparagement towards someone who provides "service".

The absolute grace and equanimity that members of the hospitality industry display is divinity in action. We will create joyful memories for major life milestones, and provide empathy and support during those bad days. All off this while 1 in 7 tipped workers live in poverty in the nation's capital. The very people who perform an action to make your life easier may not have eaten that day or may be sleeping on the streets.

The last seven years in the industry I have borne witness to the best and worst of colleagues, patrons, and management. An industry where employees are treated with depraved indifference and inhumanity from patrons and colleagues, with the worst of it coming from owners and management.

An industry, where my colleagues would become my family: the ones who would provide sanctuary from the visciditudes of life, the vital emotional support system I still need as I grieve and adapt to a reality in which my father no longer roams this Earth, and the reason I have been able to make a full recovery from a shattered elbow that left me unable to work for 3 months.

Last week my "sister" suffered an emotional breakdown at work. She was at her breaking point to be at work on a day/shift where all of us (2 bartenders and 6 servers) were on the floor for at least 3 hours with no patrons due to bad weather. The indifference displayed by management to all staff that was in clear economic anxiety was the straw that broke the camel's back. To hear "it's just one bad day, it'll pick up later on in the week" is not a comforting response when you're living on a economically precarious shift to shift pay cycle. Demoralized the tears of frustration would become sobs so strong it would wrack her body. I'd learn later on that she had become homeless due to the economic instability of being a tipped service worker and that all of her

belongings were to be auctioned off that day. She was counting on coming to work and being able to earn an income that day-but when your income potential is put at the mercy of the unpredictable factors such as weather, unfair scheduling, and whims of generosity from strangers it's in reality economic roulette each shift. What else could she do, but act like her world wasn't falling apart all and pretend to all those around that everything was fine.

I support One Fair Wage, as it would reduce the exploitation of the most vulnerable and marginalized who are in the shadows struggling to survive. It would reduce economic anxiety and ensure a measure of economic dignity. It forces us all to examine and ask the ever-essential question "What type of society do we want to be?" My moral, ethical and spiritual compass is grounded in the belief that we should and want to be a nation that where anyone who is willing to work hard and work full time they should not have to worry how they are going to eat and if they are going to have a place to sleep that night. It's as Gandhi would say " Be the Change" in the world you want to see.

For supporting One Fair Wage myself and fellow colleagues became targets to online and offline bullying, name-calling, intimidation, and retaliation in attempts to silence us and to stop the movement. One night while out with friends I was nearly assaulted by a fellow industry worker who opposes the initiative. My employer has cut me down to one shift a week for advocating for dignity and humanity in this profession. I'm able to endure the indignities rendered due to the generosity of my surviving parent and the legacy of another parent who passionately believed one's economic status should not be a judge of one's character.

I am before you today sacrificing that one shift to tell you and share the narrative of the most vulnerable, many of whom I work side by side, do indeed exist. I refuse to allow their voices to be diminished and drowned out by the elitist high end tip earners. Your attempt to repeal this initiative sends a message to myself and my beloved family, some of whom are the tired, poor, and hungry of this city and profession that they are inconsequential; that their struggles and hardships to pursue the American Dream and exist with dignity are met with callousness that is inhumane. This is in direct violation to the promise that Lady Liberty sends out to the world when she lifts her torch guiding the way.

Initiative 77 is the response to a racist economic business model that flourishes under deliberate pay inequity. A system designed to keep workers in poverty and economic anxiety. This piece of legislation is a step in the direction needed. The time has come to face and address the challenges a flawed compensation model presents. It reflects a system that does NOT work for everyone. Initiative 77 is not about hurting those who already do well, but ending the last vestige of legalized Jim Crow era practices.

In spite of fear-mongering and deceptive rhetoric on June 19th voters made their voices heard. The message was loud and clear end the exploitation of 29,000 tipped workers and pay them one fair wage with tips on top. The attempt to overturn the will of the people through repeal sets a dangerous precedent, and is blatant voter suppression. Citizens are rightfully outraged that public servants who are hired by them to work for them have been sent a message that DC

voices, especially the African-Americans, do not matter and that the voice of the National Restaurant Association (NRA) is more powerful.

I stand before you in fiery dissent fighting for the industry, the city, the country, the society, and the world I want it to be, and frankly should be. For me that means holding this democratic body accountable to the very people whom you work for and that it's your sacred responsibility to carry out the will of the people and to respect the democratic process.

An entire nation is watching to see if we live up to the founding ideals this country was built on, those same ideals that no other place in the world can compete with. The allure and magic that captivates immigrants with the great "American Dream" and being the "Beacon of Light"

In solidarity with love and loyalty from a 1st generation Indian-American immigrant for those family members--the most vulnerable and marginalized--the voices who must be heard and have a rightful seat at the table.