

DAIS STATEMENT ON INITIATIVE 77

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am circulating an amendment, which I have worked on in collaboration with my colleagues.

A majority of D.C. voters approved Initiative 77 in June. The debate around this voter initiative has raised many questions about tipping, restaurant and bar culture, and voter initiatives, among others. It also raises an important question of who gets to speak and who is listened to at the Wilson Building, as well as who is not speaking, who we're not hearing from and why, on important matters of public policy that impact our city.

I want to thank all the servers and bartenders who spoke. For many of you, it was your first time testifying before the D.C. Council and we benefited from your participation in the process. Thank you to all the restaurant operators as well.

And thank you to Ward 7 resident Dia King. Mr. King was the only non-restaurant tipped employee we heard from in 17 hours of testimony and hundreds of emails, despite there being thousands of non-restaurant tipped workers in our city. Mr. King told us a parking valet, like him, makes \$7 an hour and relies on tips from customers who are paying \$40 to \$50 to have him park their cars. Mr. King testified most people don't realize that he relies on tips to make at least the minimum wage, and many car owners don't tip. I want to make clear he said his employer does make up the difference if he falls short, but very simply, after 10 years helping DC welcome visitors to our city and being part of our hospitality industry, Mr. King wants a raise. I think he deserves one, and apparently so did his bosses, because after he testified, I heard he got one.

So it really does pay to testify!

I kid, but this is serious issue. Mr. King was the only non-restaurant tipped worker to speak publicly, and there were also very few bussers, back backs, or food runners who testified, the indirectly tipped workers or front of the house support staff. Their voices really weren't a part of this debate.

So what do we do when we don't hear from workers who are impacted by legislation? Do we just ignore them? Say that the squeaky wheel gets the oil and leave it at that?

I think we need to understand why we aren't hearing from them and Mr. King said it: A lot of his colleagues are immigrants, and especially now, with the hateful, cruel man we have as President, they don't want to come forward to any kind of government entity, especially to complain.

That gets me to the heart of this compromise: It listens to all voices. It upholds the spirit of the initiative our voters passed in June, while listening to the many servers, bartenders, and operators, as well as listening to workers like Mr. King.

This amendment says to DC's servers and bartenders: We hear you. The tipped minimum will remain under the timeline the restaurant association negotiated in 2013.

The amendment also listens to Mr. King: The amendment takes the most vulnerable workers, bussers and barbacks and non-restaurant tipped workers, and brings them up to the minimum wage but at a slower pace than Initiative 77.

I want to explain why, for those who think you either like the tipped wage or you don't. There are operators who treat their employees right, and we know from wage theft claims, there are ones who don't. The ones who do treat these employees right are already pay these workers double or even triple the tipped wage, in recognition that the bussers and barbacks can't make up the difference so easily like servers and bartenders.

We learned through the debate and hearing wage theft and sexual harassment are big issues in hospitality work. My amendment collaborators take it as a compliment that after we made public our compromise, parts of it somehow ended up in the bill that circulated. Our language is more robust and specific, perhaps because we were working on it for more than a week instead of quickly over the weekend to decapitate part of our package.

I think that shows our compromise is reasonable. It says to DC voters we hear you, to DC restaurant workers we hear you, and protects those who can't speak for themselves.

I ask my colleagues to vote for this amendment that respects the will of the voters and respects our restaurant workers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

