

**Testimony of:  
Mayor Buddy Dyer  
Orlando, Florida**

**Hearing on "Restaurants in America During the COVID-19 Pandemic"  
Before the Subcommittee on Select Revenue Measures  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Ways and Means Committee**

**September 25, 2020**

Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Smith and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Buddy Dyer. For the last seventeen years, I've had the privilege of serving as the mayor of the great city of Orlando, Florida.

Most of you probably know Orlando as the world's number one destination for visitors. We also like to say that Orlando is one of the world's best places to live, work, learn, play and run a small business.

In many ways, Orlando is America's new melting pot... a regional community where a thousand new residents join us every week, seeking unmatched quality of life and unparalleled access to opportunity.

There's no better example of the strength that comes from our diversity and how we work to create access to opportunity than our restaurants.

Plain and simple, Orlando is a "restaurant town." We're home to the headquarters of some of the most iconic brands in the world... including Darden Restaurants, Red Lobster and Ruth's Chris. We also boast popular emerging independent brands such as 4-Rivers BBQ and Hawkers Asian Street Fare.

Equally important... we're home to a growing Downtown and many Main Street small business districts. These are corridors that are filled with family owned restaurants whose owners are living the American dream every day... making incredible food.... adding to the unique and diverse culture of our city... while providing our residents with places to make memories with friends and family while sharing a meal. Our restaurant scene is why the Chicago Tribune and other publications have begun citing Orlando among the best "foodie cities" in America.

Our restaurants and the ecosystem that supports those restaurants (From the jobs they create.... to their retail neighbors... to the professional services that support restaurants... to the supply chain, etc.) are a vital part of our local economy. They are a foundational part of Orlando's culture.

Today, I am here on behalf of that diverse restaurant ecosystem... and everyone who's a part of it. I'm here on behalf of our main street small business owners in Orlando... and small business owners across America.

I'm here to deliver a distress call.

Our restaurants are in trouble. And, they need your help immediately.

In Orlando, we've partnered with our restaurants to think and act "outside the box" over the last several months to help provide restaurants with ways to stay afloat during this crisis. We expanded outdoor dining, turned City streets into restaurant "parklets," and expanded carryout alcohol sales. We've done just about everything we can do from a local government perspective. At this moment, though, more than a third of our restaurant workforce has been laid off or furloughed and operators don't know when, or if, they will be able to bring them back. And, our restaurants need federal help.

Distinguished members of the Subcommittee... I wish each of you could take a walk with me through one of our small business districts. You'd meet so many great people. You'd hear so many powerful stories about what it means to put everything you have into a business... into a dream.

Right now, you'd also hear stories of perseverance and strength. You'd hear what it's like to have worked harder than you ever thought possible to endure the last seven months of a pandemic in order to keep your business open and employees on-staff. You'd hear how much they want to operate safely. Finally, you'd hear desperation, what it's like to be scared about the future and not know how much longer they can hold on.

I know Congress and the Administration are currently debating various ways that they can help restaurant owners survive this pandemic. When I talk with restaurateurs in my community, they are pretty clear on the type of help they need: expansion and increased flexibility of the Paycheck Protection Program, expansion of the Employee Retention Tax Credit that I know this committee is considering, and tax credits to help with the unexpected costs of personal protective equipment to safeguard the health of their employees and customers alike. Those are three big things that can help those businesses - and by association those town centers and communities - make it through some of the most difficult economic times in our history.

There will be a time when this pandemic is over and when life returns to normal. For so many people, that return to normal will involve being able to, once again, gather at a restaurant without fear or worry.

The thing is, if we don't act now to help our restaurants endure this crisis, there may not be restaurants to go back to.

That is not exaggeration. That's reality on Main Street America right now. I implore you to put partisan differences aside and work together to help our restaurants.

Thank you.