

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1804

April 22, 2010

Louisiana Restaurant Association
Board of Directors and Members
2700 N. Arnoult Road
Metairie, Louisiana 70002

Dear Louisiana Restaurant Association Board of Directors and Members,

It has come to my attention that a member of your organization has distributed an email that grossly mischaracterizes our discussion in Washington D.C. last week, as well as my position on the health care reform bill. I have worked closely with the Louisiana Restaurant Association over the years, and have always respected your views and input. That's why I wanted to write this letter to clarify a few points.

Through many months of tough negotiations, Congress set out to drive down health care costs for families and small businesses through improving and expanding choice and competition in the private insurance market. The bill that we passed, in my view, accomplished that objective, and did so without a government takeover of health care. But no law is perfect, and I readily acknowledge that more work will be done to improve the law as it is implemented.

I specifically stated to the group last week that the healthcare reform bill is now law, and while some politicians may try to repeal it, I doubt that they will be successful. I believe these efforts will become irrelevant when people start to realize how much this reform law will benefit everybody, particularly small business owners.

As Chair of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, I took a keen interest in the plight of small business owners who were facing unsustainable health care costs. In 2009, a poll conducted by the Small Business Majority found that 68% of Louisiana small business owners did not provide health insurance for their employees because it was too expensive. Of that number, 60% said they would if they could. That's why I successfully fought to add a series of amendments to help small businesses with the cost of providing affordable, quality health care coverage to their employees. These include:

- **Tax credits:** I authored amendments to make the small business tax credit for health care coverage both more generous and available sooner – so small businesses could take it beginning this year. Today, you can go to the IRS website (www.irs.gov) to see if you qualify for this credit this year.

- **Waiting periods:** At the request of restaurant owners, I authored a provision that gives small businesses more time to insure new employees without facing penalties. Under the original bill, businesses that did not enroll their employees in health insurance within 30 days would have paid a fine. My amendment extended the waiting period to 90 days with no penalty.
- **No Business Mandate:** Perhaps most important to all Louisiana business owners, the new law does not impose a mandate for businesses to provide health insurance.

One provision that I championed, specifically at the request of restaurant owners, was modifying the definition of full-time employee to 390 hours per calendar quarter (13 weeks) instead of the current 30 hours per week on average. This would have taken into account the fluctuations in hours an employee works and reduced the impact of the employer requirements for industries with high turnover and that rely on part-time employees to sustain their business. Unfortunately, this provision was not included in the final bill, but I worked hard to ensure your ideas were heard and will continue to do so.

My efforts on behalf of the restaurant industry throughout this debate are well-documented. In the past few months, I have been honored to receive many public and private acknowledgments from people within your industry, but you do not need to take my word for it. For your reference, I have included with this letter one such press release that I received thanking me for this work – from the National Restaurant Association.

With warmest regards I am,

Sincerely,



Mary L. Landrieu
United States Senator

MLL:clb



NEWS RELEASE

The Corporation of the Economy, Career Opportunities and Community Involvement
1200 Seventeenth Street NW, Washington, DC, 20036 www.restaurant.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 9, 2009

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National Restaurant Association Hails U.S. Sen. Landrieu's Pro-Small-Business Health Care Amendment, Commends Her Leadership

(Washington, D.C.) – National Restaurant Association President and CEO Dawn Sweeney made the following statement today regarding the introduction of an amendment to the U.S. Senate's health care reform bill by Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.) that will help the nation's small businesses and restaurants:

“The National Restaurant Association strongly supports Senator Mary Landrieu's amendment for a 90-day waiting period for employers in the Senate health care legislation. This pro-restaurant amendment would eliminate the onerous fees currently in the Senate bill for waiting periods of less than 90-days.

“Senator Landrieu's pro-small-business, pro-worker amendment will enable restaurant operators to provide our employees the highest quality benefits at the most affordable price. On behalf of the nation's nearly one million restaurants and its 13 million employees, we thank Senator Landrieu for her outstanding leadership.

“Due to the restaurant industry's average annual turnover rate of 75 percent of the workforce, a 90-day waiting period is critical. Restaurateurs want to offer affordable health coverage for our employees and lower the cost of that coverage. By allowing a 90 day waiting period, restaurant operators will be able to keep the cost lower for premiums of their employees that stay with the restaurant long term.

“We strongly believe a 90-day waiting period before coverage requirements begin could have a significant impact on lowering health care costs our restaurateurs provide their employees – for both new and current employees. This reasonable waiting period will mitigate the resources spent to cover employees who have no intention of staying with the organization for an extended period of time.

“We are working hard in this debate to protect our industry and the men and women who work in it, and we truly appreciate Senator Landrieu's efforts on their behalf.”

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Founded in 1919, the National Restaurant Association is the leading business association for the restaurant industry, which is comprised of 945,000 restaurant and foodservice outlets and a work force of 13 million employees. Together with the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation, the Association works to lead America's restaurant industry into a new era of prosperity, prominence, and participation, enhancing the quality of life for all we serve. For more information, visit our Web site at www.restaurant.org.