

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Supports bipartisan legislation to help struggling restaurants in Wisconsin

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin is supporting the reintroduction of the bipartisan, bicameral *RESTAURANTS Act of 2021*.

Supported by the *Wisconsin Restaurant Association*, the legislation is an updated proposal to establish a \$120 billion revitalization fund to support independent restaurants and small franchisees as they deal with the long-term structural challenges facing the industry because of COVID-19.

“For the last year, local restaurants and workers across Wisconsin have fought to keep their doors open, and they need our support now more than ever to survive this economic crisis,” **said Senator Baldwin**. “Many small and independent restaurants are operating at reduced capacity and may be forced to close their doors for good if we don’t act now. Our legislation will create a new revitalization fund that will help folks in Wisconsin and across the country get through this pandemic and keep our Made in Wisconsin economy moving forward.”

“Restaurants have suffered more losses in jobs and revenue than any other sector because of the COVID-19 pandemic,” **said Kristine Hillmer, President & CEO of the Wisconsin Restaurant Association**. “We have already lost many unique restaurants in our state that were the cornerstones of their communities. The majority of the remaining restaurant owners believe that it will be 7 to 12 months, or more, before business conditions return to normal for their restaurant. Restaurants need specific and targeted assistance to survive.

The *RESTAURANTS Act of 2021* establishes a \$120 billion “Restaurant Revitalization Fund” to provide direct grants to eligible entities. The *RESTAURANTS Act* is vital to helping Wisconsin’s restaurants and restaurant employees survive the devastating impact of the pandemic and sustaining our state’s once vibrant restaurant industry.”

“We fully support the bipartisan *RESTAURANTS Act of 2021* which addresses the incredible hardship restaurant and taproom operators like us have experienced over the past year,” **said Dan Katt, Co-Founder & CEO of Good City Brewing, LLC in Milwaukee.** “Our taproom restaurant in downtown Milwaukee is adjacent to Fiserv Forum and was forced to close on March 12, 2020 when the NBA season was suspended. Our revenue at that location dropped by 95% over the past year and while Paycheck Protection Program has helped us stay in business and keep many of our key employees, we face incredible hurdles to be able hire new staff, pay rent, and fulfill debt obligations in the future as we will not be able to operate at 100% capacity for many months. This is a critical piece of legislation that will help a small locally-owned business like ours eventually recover from an incredibly challenging time.”

“COVID-19 has greatly impacted our business. Since reopening on June 2, 2021 our sales have been reduced by approximately 40%,” **said Jon Seybold, Owner of Houligans Steak & Seafood Pub in Eau Claire.** “Even though the Paycheck Protection Program has helped, we are still playing ‘catch up’ financially. We had to use all of our business savings just to survive the 2+ month forced shutdown. The aid in the *RESTAURANTS Act of 2021* could allow us to expand outdoor dining opportunities which are sure to be in high demand this upcoming season. The aid could also allow us to explore modifying our banquet room into extra dining since banquet business has ‘dried up’ and we believe we will be need to keep some type of social distancing well into the future.”

The *RESTAURANTS Act of 2021* is modeled after legislation the authors [introduced last Congress](#). Their new proposal would create a \$120 billion Restaurant Revitalization Fund to provide relief to food service or drinking establishments that are part of a group of up to 20 facilities. Owners could apply for grants of up to \$10 million to cover eligible expenses retroactively to February 15, 2020, and ending eight months after the legislation is signed into law.

Grants could be used to support payroll, benefits, mortgage, rent, utilities, building maintenance and construction of outdoor facilities, supplies (including protective equipment and cleaning materials), food, operational expenses, paid sick leave, debt obligations to suppliers, and any other essential expenses.

The *RESTAURANTS Act of 2021* also includes several new provisions to help restaurants and their employees and ensure the integrity of the program. These provisions would:

- Update the award calculation based on annual loss from calendar year 2020 rather than quarterly.
- Provide grant eligibility for new restaurants that opened after January 1, 2020.
- Provide paid sick leave as an eligible expense for employees and provides a bonus amount to cover the cost of voluntarily providing 10 days of sick leave to employees.
- Provide Treasury the discretion to help reduce waste, fraud, and abuse.
- Impose reporting obligations on the Department of the Treasury to share who gets loans and demographic information about the recipients.
- Ensure that restaurants can use both the Employee Retention Tax Credit and the *RESTAURANTS Act* grant program, so long as they are not used for the same expenses.

For a full summary of the legislation, click [here](#).

The *RESTAURANTS Act* is led by Senators Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) and Roger Wicker (R-MS), and Representatives Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) in the House. The legislation is also supported by the Independent Restaurant Coalition (IRC) and the National Restaurant Association (NRA).

An online version of this release is available [here](#).