

Donald Kasprzyk, owner and banquet manager of the Boulevard Grill in Johnstown, PA. A 1985 Graduate of the University of Pittsburgh with a BA in Finance. Employed by Ameriserv Financial in various commercial lending and trust positions from 1986-1994. Opened the Boulevard Grill in 1994 as a 30-seat full-service pub and expanded it to a 300+ seat dining destination and banquet facility.

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The Boulevard Grill began as a 30-seat full-service pub in 1994. It has since grown to a 300+ seat restaurant and banquet facility with 2 full-service event rooms and several other smaller rooms for private functions.

As the owner and event manager of a restaurant that specializes in accommodating large groups, I feel we face several challenges recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have been doing our best to accommodate the ever-changing dining environment. Currently, outdoor seating is more crucial than ever, therefore we are moving forward with a project to add a second-floor balcony to our facility that will accommodate 40 guests in a completely open-air environment.

Take-out and delivery business has become more important in our revenue mix. We have been able to expand that sector slightly, however, not all structures are capable of taking advantage of this segment. We cannot physically add a pick-up window or dedicated to go area due to the design of our facility. Consequently, we have a limited ability of take advantage of this revenue stream.

As noted earlier, we specialize in accommodating large groups and events, therefore a return to a pre-covid environment without capacity restrictions is very important to a business like mine. However, staffing then becomes an issue.

A major challenge as a restaurant owner is hiring, training, and retaining staff. It seems like every restaurant is hiring and cannot fill those positions. Years ago, my major concern was if there would be enough guests to financially feed the staff, and now I worry if there will physically be enough staff to actually feed the guests. It has been difficult to fill those positions; consequently, we have been running with a smaller staff which is barely able to accommodate the current dining demand. However, I feel if this inability to hire continues it will hinder our keeping up with the increased demand for our services as we ultimately come out of the pandemic.

Not only is staffing currently difficult, the ever present, potentially extreme minimum wage increase looming over small business owners is a huge concern. I do feel that minimum wage does need to increase. For over four years I have paid my dishwashers, typically high school students with no experience, above minimum wage.

However, a one-time doubling of the minimum wage, especially in a small town such as Johnstown, would be devastating. I believe minimum wage should be increased at a consistent and predictable index to allow owners to budget and absorb those increases into their projected cash flow. Minimum wage has been too politicized over the years. It was always my impression that minimum wage was intended to be a starting wage for entry level positions that are a stepping stone on to higher wage positions. Furthermore, the minimum wage should also be established more regionally rather than state wide. Minimum wage in a town the size of Johnstown where the cost of living is noticeably lower from larger cities, even as close as Pittsburgh, should not be as high as that of the larger cities. Clearly people traveling throughout the state expect and do pay more in more metropolitan areas.

I would like to thank Representative Rigby and the committee for allowing me to voice my concerns.