



## THE CALIFORNIA TABLE PODCAST

Episode 1: "On the High-Road: Righting the Restaurant Industry"

Full Transcript 43:15

Intro Jingle 00:00:03 *Voices gather at around tables, chairs are pulled in as people take their seats, silverware clashes, blues guitar fades in.*

Betty Yee 00:00:12 Welcome to The California Table. I'm Betty Yee. We will be meeting people from our diverse regions of California who are creating their own tables to tackle some of the most pressing issues of our time. Community voices gathering, coming together to speak up for themselves, to take charge of their own lives, to fight for themselves. This is The California Table. Recently, I had a dream about restaurants, but they look different than the ones we have known. In my dream, each restaurant was a series of homes that opened up to people, gathering and eating inside dining rooms, as well as out in patios and yards, everything was shared. The kitchens, the gathering and sitting areas, the servers, and the dishwashers. I distinctly remembered guests being greeted upon arrival and invited to gather and sit. Or there may be room, no reservations, no booths, no private rooms. I remember the menu board, a single menu board for all guests that featured a variety of breads, soups and sweets from different cuisines, a menu board that had no prices. The stream left me when I woke up with a lingering, overwhelming feeling of community and the image in my mind's eye of the diversity of guests, taking me to thoughts of new possibilities for restaurants post COVID-19.

News Headlines 00:01:40 The restaurant industry is in trouble in California, 900,000 restaurant workers and already lost their jobs. And even more could when federal relief funds run out.<sup>1</sup> Workers across our state who were going on strike this morning. They're demanding stricter coronavirus safety measures as well. Protests come after a second employee at a McDonald's location on Crenshaw tested positive for coronavirus. Cooks, cashiers walk off the job.<sup>2</sup>

Betty Yee: When was the last time you dined in a restaurant? Likely for many of us, it was before the global coronavirus pandemic. Street after street and city after city restaurant establishments have shuttered with some papering over their windows as if promising that they will be reopening again soon. Yet the public health imperative for restaurants to keep their workers and customers safe has led to reopenings in fits and starts. Even before the pandemic and recession, the restaurant industry threatened the livelihoods of its workers with substandard pay and working conditions. Joining me is Saru Jayaraman, President of One Fair Wage who has been shining the spotlight on the vulnerability of restaurant workers.

Betty Yee 00:03:00 Welcome, Saru.

Saru Jayaraman: 00:03:01 Thanks for having me.

Betty Yee: 00:03:02 So when we talk about restaurant workers, who are we talking about? Are they the host staff and wait staff with whom we interact with as customers? Are they the bus people, the dishwashers, the cooks. Give us the flavor of who we're including when we talk about restaurant workers.

Saru Jayaraman: 00:03:17 We're talking about all of those people. Anybody who cooks, serves, delivers, prepares, brings the food to the table, greets you in the front of the restaurant, uh, takes your order, brings you the bread or the chips, um, clears your table, brings you your drink, serves you your drink at the bar. Or if you're in a counter service restaurant stands at the counter and takes your order, gives you your coffee. It's all of those folks. And all of those folks make up the second largest and absolute fastest growing sector of both the US and the California economy. That's 13.6 million workers prior to the pandemic nationally. And 1.7 million workers of that 13.6. So almost 2 million out of 14 million, one seventh of the entire national restaurant industry right here in California.

Betty Yee: 00:04:06 No, it is definitely a big industry here. So when, when we talk about based restaurant workers, it's obviously everyone who has anything to do with the operation and success of the establishment. Uh, are there differences in terms of how they're treated? Obviously as a customer, I see certain, uh, staff of a restaurant that others, we don't see that how, how are they treated? Are they treated equally?

Saru Jayaraman: 00:04:25 No. And the first thing to note is that as a whole, that one point a population of 1.7 million workers is actually among the lowest paid workforces in the state of California. So that, so before we even get into differences among them, it's important to note that when you have the largest and fastest growing industry in California being the lowest paid, that's not bad for those workers. It's bad for our state economy and our national economy. It's the largest and fastest growing industry though. The lowest paid, I mean, longterm, what does that do to our GDP?

Betty Yee: Not sustainable.

Saru Jayaraman: Exactly, and of course we're seeing that right now. We have seen the effects of the largest workforce being unable to take care of itself in a crisis, but even among those workers, absolutely there are severe differences and unfortunately race and gender plays a big role in who gets into which job. First of all, the industry segregated by segment. So you've got a, what we call quick serve, or that's all the fast food restaurants or anybody without a waiter, or, you know, very low end restaurants that some might say. Some are nicer, like the Panera's and the Cusi's, but they're all a minimum wage job. And then you've got casual restaurants, the IHOP's, the Denny's, the Applebee's. All the ethnic restaurants where yes, there are servers, but you don't make a lot of money in tips. Um, and then there are the fine dining restaurants. And, and I think sometimes the, maybe the people who listen to a podcast like this or read the San Francisco Chronicle, they tend to eat in nicer restaurants and in their mind,

those are the restaurants that exist when in fact fine dining restaurants are a sliver of the overall industry workers in the industry, work in casual restaurants or fast food or quick serve.

That's where the majority of workers work, and they are the lowest paid workers in America and in California. And what's really bad is that workers of color are heavily and strictly segregated into the more casual restaurants, both fast food and the casual, full service restaurants the IHOP's, the Denny's, the ethnic restaurants. If they get into fine dining, they are in what we call the back of the house, the kitchen. Or if they're in the front of the house, they're bussers and runners, they're not servers and bartenders who often make five times what a busser or runner can make.

Betty Yee: 00:06:41 You are quoted in a recent Forbes article stating black women are nearly \$5 an hour less than white men- according to national surveys of tipped workers. And close to \$8 an hour less in New York. They're putting themselves at greater risk. And when they go back to work, they earn much less.

Saru Jayaraman: 00:07:02 It's huge, huge differentials. And sadly in our research, we saw that the Bay Area was among the worst in terms of having the highest race, wage gap between workers of color and white workers of any region in the United States. Um, even though we have higher wages in the state of California, our level of occupational segregation is shameful.

Betty Yee 00:07:24 That's the greatest [in size]. Yeah. So speak a little bit about the skills, because I think, um, you know, there's a, this myth that these are low skilled jobs. Yet it seems like these are the same skills regardless, you know, of what level of restaurant.

Saru Jayaraman 00:07:39 Right. And so glad you asked that because, um, we don't call them low skill, we call them low wage jobs for high skilled workers because I challenge anybody listening to, you know,

Betty Yee 00:07:51 ....to do those jobs

Saru Jayaraman: 00:07:53 Exactly. And I'm sure many listeners did do those jobs in their youth, but, um, to really make a career in this industry, tough, uh, it does require a lot of skill and a lot of perseverance and a lot of willingness to persist. Um, you know, in the kitchen, there's a skill in cooking of course, and preparing, there's also a skill in cleaning. There's also skill in bussing tables. There's also a skill in serving customers, taking orders, anticipating needs, knowing wine, multitasking, knowing the cocktails. I mean, just at every level of the restaurant, it requires math. It requires customer service skills. It requires, again, anticipating customer needs and it requires time management. It requires a lot of independent thinking to figure out how to do things efficiently and effectively. And that's why employers who do it right- who are really invested in what we call the high road to profitability- they tell us, look taking the high road, meaning higher wages and better benefits. It actually isn't just about doing the right thing. It's actually about the bottom line, because, because these are high skilled, high touch jobs, the

better you pay people, the better you treat people, the better service you're going to be able to provide, the more your customers are going to come back.

Betty Yee 00:09:13 Absolutely, absolutely. So you are the President of One Fair Wage, which is the national coalition working to ensure every person working in America is paid a full, fair minimum wage from their employer. So why is this an issue when we actually have federal and state minimum wage laws on the books?

Saru Jayaraman 00:09:32 It's a, it's such a crazy situation. Um, and it's historical, it's important to understand the history of this issue. So, um, in our industry, this history dates back to feudal times, actually in feudal Europe is where tipping first originated. Um, it's, you know, the Aristocrats, the Nobles, wanted to get an extra or a bonus to surf or vassal. They gave a tip as an extra or bonus- Always on top of a wage. That idea of tipping came to the United States around the 1850's. Practically nobody has written about the huge strike of waiters across the United States who are mostly men at the time in 1850 and across the country, employers replaced them with women. They S gap basically to when, when men went on strike, the industry, replaced them with women. So the industry became feminized in the 1850's and then 1865, of course emancipation happened and the restaurant lobby wanted the right to hire newly freed slaves, mostly still women. So they hired black women, but they didn't want to pay them. And instead of tips saying as an extra bonus, as they were intended to be, tips became a replacement for the wage.

Betty Yee 00:10:46 So it really became institutionalized back then and carried forward.

Saru Jayaraman 00:10:49 A legacy of slavery, a legacy of Jim Crow. Um, and then that became law in 1938 as part of the New Deal. Everybody got the right to the minimum wage, supposedly, except for groups of black workers, farm workers, domestic workers, and tipped restaurant workers who are given a \$0 wage, as long as tips brought them to the full minimum wage. And we went from zero in 1938 to \$2 and 13 cents an hour, which is the current federal minimum wage for tipped workers. 43 States persist with the sub minimum wage for tipped workers. Now, California does now have a full minimum wage for tipped workers. So we are better in that way than 43 other states, but we still have a sub minimum wage for workers with disabilities. We still have a sub minimum wage in California for incarcerated workers and those other sub minimum wages for workers in California, all stem back to the restaurant industry, which was the first industry to establish a sub minimum wage. And you may know this, I'm sure people have seen the recent lawsuits against Uber and other gig companies. Many of those companies have attempted to replicate in California what the restaurant industry did and other states terms of having a sub minimum wage. Door Dash for a very long time, was trying to cut its work delivery workers payments by how much they got tipped. And that's the same idea that comes from the restaurant industry. So people have to know this all stems from the restaurant industry and it all stems from slavery. And that's why it's a time to stand up to the murder of George Floyd. I hope Americans are saying that to end all legacies of slavery and occupational segregation in our industry, the racial inequality and gender inequality and the wage and the reliance on tips even here in California, all stems back to those bad, bad history.

Betty Yee 00:12:30 Right. So restaurant workers, gig workers, other service industries too. Yes.

Saru Jayaraman 00:12:36 Nail salon, carwash. Um, yes. In other States, restaurant, nail salon, carwash, airport attendants, parking attendants, hair salon workers, all of those tipped workers can be paid a sub minimum wage. And thankfully we did get rid of that here. But as I said, other sectors like incarcerated and disabled and they still have it and we need to get rid of it.

Betty Yee 00:13:02 Absolutely. So what happens there must be just rampant wage theft then as a result of employers not stepping up and paying.

Saru Jayaraman 00:13:09 Our industry, even in California, has the highest levels of wage theft of any industry. I've talked over the years to people at the US Department of Labor who said multiple times, this industry's notorious. Of course the restaurant industry has the highest rates of wage theft of any industry in the United States because tips create this very messy problem. You know, it's very hard to know how much people are actually making in tips. And that's not just the worker's fault, by the way, people always blame workers for underreporting. Their employers don't report the tips. You know, they don't bother to count the tips or report tips as part of income. They don't want to pay taxes on those tips. They don't want to be liable.

Betty Yee: 00:13:49 Well it all gets pushed down to the workers.

Saru Jayaraman: 00:13:51 That's right. It's a very messy system. And when you live off of tips, even in California, when you get a wage of 15, which we all know is not enough to live on pretty much anywhere in California, right? Tips are an essential bonus on top of that to get you somewhere near livability, but not, not steady, not stable. They go up and down. They're still responsible for our industry having the highest rates of sexual harassment of any industry. And we actually released a report [on] Black Women's Equal Payday, August 13th and showed how there's so much bias in customer tipping. Customers have a lot of what we call implicit bias. You know, we don't know it. All of us have bias in our heads. And as a result, invariably research shows across the board, no matter how great a server of color might be in particularly women of color, they're always going to be tipped less than their white male counterparts, even when they're in fine dining, even when they're right next to a table with white guy. They're always going to earn less.

Betty Yee 00:14:53 So you really see this in action and, uh, just the biases conscious or unconscious that work, with respect to tipping. Yeah. So I'm, I'm just doing a back of the envelope calculation. So the \$2 and 13 cents, uh, that the tip minimum wage, and this is paid for employees that are actually receiving, what is it? \$30 in tips or so, so how does anyone live on this? I'm thinking if the employer doesn't step up, if we don't, um, you know, really make the tip minimum wage the same as our statement of the wage, the employer doesn't fill that gap, and if

a worker is just making the \$2 and 13 cents and that amount of tip we're talking about less than \$400 a month.

Saru Jayaraman 00:15:38 Yeah. And imagine now, Betty, imagine now tips are down 55% across the country including here in California. So workers are being told you even here in California, sadly, you will lose your benefits if you don't take any job that comes your way and work with these things. You're making me go back for \$2, \$3 or even 10, 11, 12 in California. When tips are down that 75%, you're telling me I have to risk my life to go back for a sub minimum wage when there are no tips.

Betty Yee: 00:16:13 It's just a circular untenable situation.

Saru Jayaraman 00:16:14 Untenable and I don't think people realize- I really don't think people realize the scale or the severity of what we're talking about right now. Like this created, home insecurity and economic insecurity of the highest proportion before the pandemic. Now we're talking about literally millions of workers writing to us at my organization saying I don't have money for gas to get to the food bank. There's no public transportation. When I get to the food bank, all they're offering is bread and maple syrup. I'm not going to feed that to my child day after day. You know, we've had people sending us their electricity bill saying, we don't know how much longer we can be in touch with you because our Internet's going to go. And you're talking about in California, 1.7 million workers, 13 million workers, nationally that are about to be homeless, starving. I just don't think people understand what's about to happen.

Betty Yee 00:17:09 So glad you raised this [point] because it is shameful. These are workers who are in the food industry sector of our economy that obviously has been, just so affected by this pandemic and the recession. And yet they're on the frontlines of, experiencing food insecurity and cost of living. So when I think about this, I think about them. What's happened with all of those assistance and aid and relief that's been coming down to California from Washington. Do you have any sense of how helpful programs like the Paycheck Protection Program has been for restaurant establishments to actually keep their workers on payroll?

Saru Jayaraman 00:17:50 It's been really, really, really hard. First of all, let's talk about unemployment insurance. Unemployment insurance was such a mess. You know, they just didn't have the setup to really process the amount of workers, but it's not, I don't, I mean, Julie, she's amazing in California. I don't blame necessarily the people running unemployment insurance, you know, the system is just set up this way in the same way. In the thirties, they excluded tipped workers from the overall minimum wage. At that time, they created unemployment insurance with the intention of forcing workers to take any low wage job that came their way. And so there was kind of built into the system, and intent to deny. An intent to deny meaning we want to make sure it's really hard to get benefits so that people will not use it. It's the Republicans logic right now. We don't want to give them benefits of \$600, cause they may not go back to work well. Well then why aren't you paying them more than \$600? Every time I hear that, I think \$600 is \$30,000 a year. I challenge any of those Republicans to live on

\$30,000 anywhere, anywhere, anywhere. Yeah. So unemployment insurance was set up to fail, was set up to deny people. So you've got people without benefits. Then their bosses get PPP when their bosses, they weren't ready to reopen, but they needed to somehow survive. So they took the PPP. The PPP requires them to hire people immediately, or that loan, that forgivable loan turns into a real loan. And so they brought people back without being ready. And the workers are saying again, you're making me come back. I lose my benefits because you're offering me the job, but you're making me come back often for a very low wage with no tips, risk my life risk, my children's life because of exposure

Betty Yee 00:19:49 Not even certainty and hours to be worked.

Saru Jayaraman 00:19:51 No certainty. You know, no protocols, no safety protocols, just not ready. And so the system was a mess. I mean, PPP was necessary to save a lot of businesses, but the way it was done was a mess, a mess. And then you had, of course, the fact that all the chains and the larger businesses had a much easier time accessing what was supposed to be for small businesses. And so many small businesses rejected because they just didn't have the relationship with the banks that were processing the PPP that the big guys did. That, I got to say, though, that all of this crisis creates opportunity because that horrible way that PPP was set up finally drove a wedge between the big chains in the National Restaurant Association and the California Restaurant Association and independent restaurants who ended up forming dozens and dozens and dozens of independent restaurants, associations around the country that have been more open to progressive and high road values. It's the first time in my 20 years of organizing in the restaurant industry, that I've seen a willingness at independent restaurants to step away from the California Restaurant Association, National Restaurant Association and say they are not speaking for us. And we want to have our own voice. It is so positive because when you said a few minutes ago, this is shameful. How could this happen? The truth is it happens because of the shameful power and influence of the National Restaurant Association, the California Restaurant Association. It was long overdue for independent restaurants to say, you know what, our survival lies more with the health of our workers and communities. And it does.

Betty Yee: 00:21:25 Right, right. So very worker centric. It's very focused on the workers.

Saru Jayaraman: 00:21:27 Yeah.

Betty Yee 00:21:34 Coming up- reimagining the restaurant industry

Betty Yee 00:21:47 So Saru, the independent restaurant coalition. And that's been really just wonderful to see across the country, how so many of our restaurant owners are stepping up to really do their own advocacy, unfortunately, for emergency relief, but how do we not have, how do we not have this really fall back into the trap of what was established in the 1930s? So the minimum wage didn't work for everyone. We have unemployment that, is a program that was full of hurdles in terms of who could access it. So both of those programs essentially have failed. So what's the independent restaurant coalition seeking that really will be helpful?

Saru Jayaraman: 00:22:23 Yeah, I mean, there are dozens of independent restaurant associations. Not all of them are on the same page, but I will say there are several national and local around the country that have been talking to us and working with us and saying, actually we just need to reimagine the whole thing. We need to reimagine the restaurant industry from scratch, how we serve people, who we serve, the segregation in the industry, not just the worker segregation, also the customer segregation and the wages and the way we pay people and the way we treat people and the way we value people and the equity between front and back, all of those things are being reexamined. And so what's so hopeful for me is the willingness to wholesale rethink this. And in some cases, advocate with us for policy change.

Betty Yee: 00:23:08 Sure, sure. Well, long overdue and I hope that is the case. Do you think in this era of the pandemic and how businesses have had to operate, does this allow for a little bit more creativity and flexibility about what restaurants can look like? And we'll talk more about just some of the things that are specifically involved with, the things to me of, you know, certainly people have been sheltering in place, they've been more focused on eating at home with some of the early parts of the pandemic. And now people are really feeling like they really missed this experience. So, what are- how do you pinpoint what that experience is and what should it be in terms of how it gets recreated? That really focuses on the wellbeing of our workers.

Sara Jayaraman 00:23:56 So we actually did this partnered meeting with Institute for the Future and the James Beard Foundation and about 30 restaurant owners from around the country, because we examined three aspects of the industry. One is the fact that there's such low wages and in particular, some people get tips. Some people don't. It's a sub minimum wage for tipped workers. You know, that was one thing we wanted to flip on its head and reimagine. Another thing we wanted to flip on its head and reimagine is the fact that most customers have no idea about the true cost of food or the finances of a restaurant, right? And so we pay tips thinking that they're an extra bonus or, you know, something a whim kind of, you know, not knowing that this actually is, um, the labor costs, we're paying the labor cost of the truth. And so how could we actually educate customers about the true cost of a meal, and encourage people to think differently about what they're willing to pay, in terms of the true cost of a meal. That was the second thing we talked about. And the third thing we wanted to flip on its head is this idea that you can only be profitable if your dining floor is full, every aspect of that sentence we thought from you have to all be on the dining floor. Can you be outside? Can you be providing meals at home? Can you do catering in the street? Can you serve all day? Can you serve different clientele for really fancy restaurants? Many fancy restaurants are working with us now on feeding programs. Could you imagine people in need actually eating at your restaurant alongside or next to a table as somebody, some person You know the possibilities are really endless. The possibility for the restaurant industry to live into its true potential of being a place where people come together and that old saying break bread, that people of different races and classes, genders, backgrounds could actually come and break bread. Um, hasn't been realized by this industry because of the segregation, but that is part of the re-imagining,

Betty Yee 00:26:01 That's exciting actually to think about. So I'm thrilled to know that, there's some thoughts going into that now and we're in prices, but also as you say, where the opportunities are. You've been really a leading voice for, you know, calling for this reset in the restaurant industry, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic. And, and I think the choice that I've heard you speak about, it's really the stark choice that we have to say. So that is, well, are restaurant workers added to the ranks of those living at, or below poverty, or will there be a path for them to move forward and really according to the dignity that these workers, uh, rightly deserve and I guess before you respond to that choice, I do really want you to delve into the High Road Kitchens Project, because to me, you know, we've talked about just, kind of the untenable circular system that really works against workers that with the High Road Kitchens Project, which I just find so inspiring on so many different levels, they're taking this entire ecosystem of, you know, a restaurant kitchen and just doing some phenomenal things with it. But, talk about that first.

Saru Jayaraman 00:27:06 Sure. It kind of goes back to what you were saying earlier about how maybe we didn't do minimum wage, right to begin with. Maybe we didn't do unemployment insurance right to begin with. And certainly right now we're not doing relief, right. In other words, relief right now is still, you know, focused on, you still have the larger chains and larger businesses getting more. And there's no conditions on the relief for employers of any kind. It's blanket relief. It's not like there are any worker protections or even incentive to do things differently.

Betty Yee 00:27:40 It's really, whoever has the best capability of access — again, because of their relationships — are first in line.

Speaker 3 00:27:46 And so we wanted to model what it looks like to do relief in a way, shape relief in a way that shapes the future. How could you design relief in a way that's not just about the immediate moment and getting us back to where we were, because frankly, where we were didn't work, how do you provide relief in a way that incentivizes change? And that's what High Road Kitchens was about. It was a program with Governor Newsom and Secretary of Labor to where we were able to raise private philanthropy and public dollars, public workforce money to provide grants, to restaurants that commit to going through our equity program. We provide training to restaurant owners on how to increase race and gender equity, how to desegregate their restaurants, how to introduce antisexual harassment programs, anti-racism programs. Um, and so they have to commit to going through that program, commit to increasing equity and wages also commit to providing 500 free meals. And so it's a win, win, win. It provided grants that saved a lot of small businesses, especially businesses owned by people of color who maybe didn't have access to some of the other programs, but it also did so in a way that incentivize change, increase equity, increase wages, and also did so in a way that had the restaurant owners actually providing free meals. And we set it up as a pay as you go model. In other words, you, as a customer with any of these restaurants that were chosen to choose to pay nothing, because you're getting a free meal or you could choose to pay \$20 and subsidized

three other people's free meals. So that allowed, so one of the restaurants in San Diego that started the program started with a commitment of 500 free meals, and now it's surpassed 3000 free meals as a result of the customers of the restaurant, the regulars wanting to pay for other people's meals.

Betty Yee 00:29:35 That's phenomenal, That's phenomenal.

Saru Jayaraman: 00:29:36 I just want to say and now, California was so successful there so de Blasio replicated in New York City with a much larger program. Now Mayor Duggan and the Kellogg Foundation are doing it in Detroit and we're doing it in Massachusetts. So we started something here in California that was about again, showing how relief could look different, um, and then doing it elsewhere. And by the way, we created a relief fund for workers too. That was also about shaping the future. So we can, I can tell you more about that if you're interested.

Betty Yee 00:30:06 Please! Because this has to work for the workers. I mean, if we've learned anything from this pandemic, it is, and particularly here in California, just how much of our economy really is reliant on a foundation of service workers that really, elevate the success of so many other sectors. And so when you think about, you know, where that relief needs to be directed, that is going to help recreate a foundation. That just seems to make sense. Talk a little bit about that. I think that's really important.

Saru Jayaraman 00:30:34 Yeah. I can, like, there were so many relief programs that came, and most of them, and ours too, were one time relief. So it was like, you know, providing cash assistance to low wage workers who had lost their jobs. And I, you know, we started the fund on March 16th, about \$23 million came in pretty quickly. We were pretty overwhelmed by people's generosity, but it, you know, it was a drop in the bucket, 30,000 workers applied in California, 200,000 applied nationally. We've only been able to fund about 50,000 of the 200,000 and even that with one time payments. But the thing that was really important to us as an organization seeking long term structural change, not just again, providing the fish, but teaching how to fish. For us it was about providing relief to workers that brought them into a community and then organizing them to vote, organizing them, to mobilize, organizing them to speak up for change. And so, I did want to, I mean, California, we have 30,000 workers and we're mobilizing people for change, but we're also doing this in some of the key battleground States that are gonna really make a difference for the November election. We had 30,000 workers apply to the fund from Florida. Florida is a really key state for November. And all of those workers that came to us for money are now working with us to get their peers in the restaurant industry out to vote. And that's big because our industry has a less than 20% voter turnout rate. We know from experience that when you talk about the issues that matter most to restaurant workers, which is their wages to their lowest wage workforce, and when you have them talk to each other about voting, rather than saying, Oh, you should vote as an outsider. So a waitress talking to a waitress

Betty Yee: 00:32:13 That's right. Peer to peer.

Saru Jayaraman: 00:32:14 That, that has been so effective. We're doing it in Florida. We're doing in Michigan and Pennsylvania, all battleground States where we'd have thousands of workers who come to us for relief and every dollar that we are raising for relief really count twice- one getting immediate relief and two organizing these workers to vote.

Betty Yee 00:32:34 That's wonderful. That's wonderful. I think building that community power is so important for how to get sustaining, lasting change. You know, we always talk about how voters tend to vote their pocketbook. And yet when you look at these workers and how much they have to juggle to really make their, meet their needs, I just think the motivation is going to be so strong when we organize them. So that's wonderful, wonderful work.

Betty Yee: 00:33:03 In a moment we will learn about what we as consumers can do

Betty Yee 00:33:11 I know since the pandemic I've missed frequenting a couple of my favorite restaurants. You know certainly for the wonderful food and sustenance, but also just to support local businesses that are so vital to my community. We know nationally 40% of independent restaurants are owned by immigrants. These businesses represent the fulfillment of the American dream. I also know the longing, many have to return to the days of normal when the public health directives to physically distance, and wear masks are lifted. So, do we want to go back to the normal as it relates to the restaurant industry and the workers we've known?

Saru Jayaraman: 00:33:45 Absolutely. Can I just say one thing for us about going back to normal as you were talking about, maybe this would help people to think about this when Trump was elected, a lot of people were dismayed in America to find that so many Americans bought into this notion of make America great again. Which we all know was really code for let's return to an era in which white supremacy reigned supreme. There was no..

Betty Yee 00:34:12 Make America white again.

Saru Jayaraman: 00:34:13 Make America white again, right? A lot of people were horrified by the notion that what's great to some we know was horrible for a lot. So I would just say for people who love to eat out, and we as Americans, we eat out more than anybody else on earth. We actually made world history a few years ago becoming the first nation on earth and really the only nation on earth in which we spend more money on food, even outside of the home than we do on food inside of the home. We celebrate our culture in restaurants in a way that nobody else on earth does, people celebrate at home birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, they celebrate at home. They don't do it in restaurants. We do it in restaurants. The restaurant for us is the Plaza of Latin America or, some of Europe. We, this is the gathering spot. And yet for those people who are missing that like yearning for that past, I would just say, there's a disconnect in the same way there's a disconnect where the Trumpsters who yearn for the path in which people of color and immigrants where were, were lesser than. There is a yearning for the past among foodies, which I understand cause I miss going to restaurants too, but a yearning for a

past that didn't work. That didn't work for millions of people who are cooking and serving and preparing our food. So I would just ask you to compare that idea of going back to normal to the idea of make America great again, because it's the same idea. Let's go back to a time when things worked for me, not for you.

Betty Yee 00:35:34 That's right. Exactly. Exactly.

Saru Jayaraman 00:35:45 Having said that there is such hope on the horizon that we're not going to go back to that path. So we are going to go as our investee really said through the portal into something entirely new. And that portal for me, I'm already seeing, because we have been approached by so many hundreds of restaurant owners during the pandemic and after George Floyd's murder saying to us, I really want to change. I want to learn how to move to a higher wage model. I want to learn how to move, to increase equity. I have been so touched and moved by the number of restaurant owners, many of whom, by the way, fought us in the past. Fought us against increased wages. Were public about their opposition, are now saying, yes, actually we need to change. This is the time to change. It is. I mean, just yesterday, I got an email from an employer that was very vocal in their opposition. A leading employer that has said, they're now transitioning to a higher livable wage. It's a moment of real transformation. It's sad that it took this kind of a crisis, but I think employers saw, especially independent restaurants saw workers in their communities devastated. They see that tips are down. And so they realized they can't bring people back for very low wages. They have to pay more, but a lot of people were genuinely moved by the national uprising for racial equity to say, well, what is the equity solution in our industry? And it really is paying a livable wage and desegregating our issue racially, like really being willing to put people of color in the front of the house inside dining, allow them to move up ladders in a way that just hasn't happened before.

Betty Yee 00:37:25 Yes, that's very promising, very promising and of course we hear much more frequently now, which is also promising, where so many of these restaurant workers really are like family for the owners and you know, how to, um, you know, really provide for them. And, and there's wonderful, inspiring stories that we hear from time to time of restaurant owners giving up their retirement savings to be able to still provide for their, for their workers. And, and you know, you look at all of this and, and I hope this is a moment where as we're rethinking the industry, as we're rethinking how we create, you know, policies now that finally write the support that workers need. We're seeing a convergence of some very, very critical elements of what to be really successful. So Saru, I'm a customer of my restaurants that I love to frequent. And how can I, along with other consumers, lift up restaurant workers, are there key policy changes to which we can lend our advocacy voices?

Saru Jayaraman: 00:38:25 I would say three things. One is that you can, every time you eat out, you can raise your voice as a consumer. So you can go to the [highroadkitchens.com](https://www.highroadkitchens.com) website in California and see which restaurants are part of High road Kitchens and support those restaurants. But it's not a huge list, it's like 50 restaurants statewide. So what we, more importantly, what we need you to do is actually every time you order out, or if you're doing

outdoor dining, communicate with the employer, with the manager, not the server, Hey, I love eating here. I really liked the food. I'd love to see you become a High Road restaurant, be a part of High Road Kitchen. So I want to put you in touch with this organization that can help you change to a more equitable system. And so that really makes a difference. That really makes a difference. If consumers can communicate their values in that way, to restaurant owners that's one. Two is that every consumer is a resident of this country, has a representative. Even if you don't vote, you have a representative, you can speak up, you can demand change. You know, California has lots of Congressmembers and senators, this, if the Senate flips in November to a blue Senate, which it very well might, \$15 is going to be on the table in the Senate. It already passed in the house with one fair wage, with the full minimum wage, the Senate and I were very worried that Senate Democrats, if it's controlled by Democrats will pass the team, but we'll leave out the tipped workers because that's, what's happened year after, year in state, after state. And so we need to tell our senators, um, now Dianne Feinstein, and now we're going to have a different Senator. Cause our senator is becoming the vice president. We need to tell our senators, we expect to see them, see what California has done and stand by a full livable minimum wage for tipped workers, not carve those tipped workers out. So we need to communicate to our federal legislators that this has got to change at the federal level, full, livable, minimum wage once fair wage for everybody. And the third thing is that you can get involved. We need volunteers to call the 200,000 workers who applied to us for relief and get them that relief, but then engage them in voting, engage them in organizing and power building. So you can go to [onefairwage.com](http://onefairwage.com). You can check out our emergency fund website, [OFWemergencyfund.org](http://OFWemergencyfund.org) and on that emergency fund website, you can click, volunteer and sign up as a volunteer or sign up to donate. And as I mentioned, when you donate, you can actually, your donation goes double because it's about providing immediate relief to these workers. And at the same time organizing them to vote.

Betty Yee 00:41:01 That's fantastic really good, wonderful concrete ideas. Again, just, I want to just emphasize how, you know, we as consumers really have a lot of power and, you've just given us some wonderful concrete ideas because you know what I mean, the fact is I think nearly every one of us know someone who's a restaurant worker, whether a family member or a neighbor, um, we certainly know them as customers. And so I think, when we know about their skilled work, their hard work, which is a major factor in terms of the dining experience we enjoy, I think the least we can do is just to express our support for them and to do our part, to bring dignity to somebody who is serving us. And Saru Jayaraman, I just want to thank you for your work at One Fair Wage, the important conversation today, and for your critical work and leadership. This is not an issue that's going to go away. And I hope that when we are really on the other side of this pandemic, we are just seeing all kinds of creative, imaginative ideas that really is going to restore finally the dignity to these workers that has been missing for so, so long and most importantly, to ensure that they can see a path forward where they can drive and just be full participants in our society and economy. So thank you very much for being here.

Saru Jayaraman: 00:42:14 Thank you for your leadership in the state. We so appreciate having you a champion of workers at state level. Really appreciate it.

Betty Yee 00:42:24 We've heard about ways to support restaurant workers. Visit [highroadkitchens.com](https://highroadkitchens.com) for a list of participating restaurants committed to supporting restaurant workers, healthcare, first responders and others in need. To donate or volunteer to elevate the voices of restaurant workers learn about the one fair wage emergency fund by visiting [OFWEmergencyFund.org](https://OFWEmergencyFund.org). This is Betty Yee saying so long until the next episode of The California Table.

Paid for by Betty Yee for Treasurer 2026 (FPPC ID #1417532).

News Sources:

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