



Rhode Island
HOSPITALITY
Association

*Voice of Rhode Island's Lodging,
Restaurant, and Tourism Industry*

November 9, 2014

RI Hospitality Association Combats \$15 Minimum Wage by Providence Hotel Workers

Dale J. Venturini
President/CEO of RI Hospitality Association



The Issue

- Last spring, a well-organized group of Providence hotel workers introduced an ordinance to increase their minimum wage to \$15/hour.
- This ordinance would affect hotel employees as well as the employees of any independent businesses within the hotel such as valets, gift shops and restaurants.



The Timeline

- The Proposed Ordinance would have taken effect in three stages:
 - Hotels with 200+ rooms: 12 months after passage.
 - Hotels with 100+ rooms: 24 months after passage.
 - Hotels with 25+ rooms: 36 months after passage.



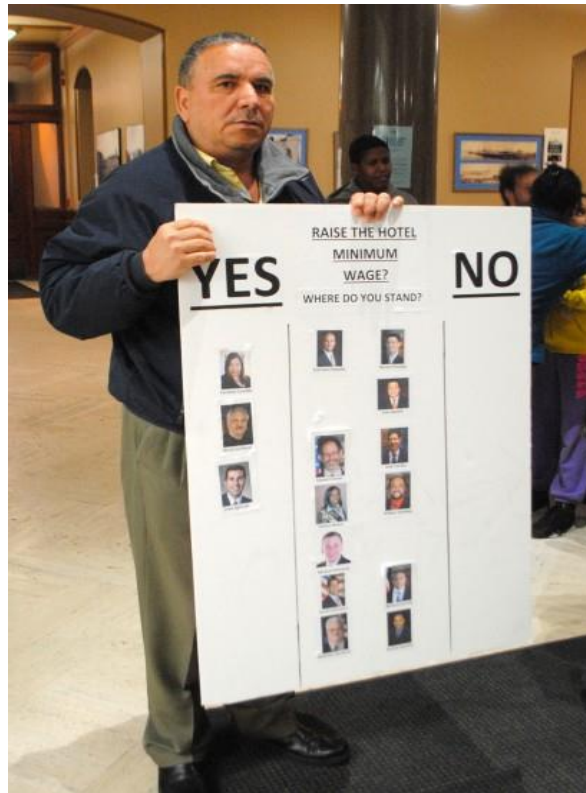
Additional Information

- Tips would not be credited against the \$15 minimum wage.
- All service charges would be paid to hotel employees only and not retained by the hotel or managerial staff.
- Hotel was prevented from taking any adverse employment action against an employee for exercising any right protected under the ordinance.
- Provided a private right of action for employees to sue for violations and receive 2x damages and attorneys' fees to the prevailing party.



The Battle Begins

The hotel workers exerted immense pressure on the Providence City Council from the beginning. With an election looming in the fall, the council members seemed strongly in support of the ordinance.



The Battle Begins

- In response to the hotel workers' activities, RIHA retained one of the top labor attorneys in Rhode Island to present its position to the City Council's Ordinance Committee.
- Approximately 65 RIHA members packed the City Council chambers in advance of the hearing and made it clear to the Ordinance Committee that it could not adopt this ordinance without a fight.
- In addition, I penned several columns and an op-ed piece on the devastating impact this ordinance would have on business owners if passed.



The Battle Begins

- However, hundreds of hotel workers flooded the meeting chambers, militantly chanting “Si se Puede” (“Yes We Can”).
- As our attorney presented RIHA’s position, the hordes of workers hissed and booed, ignoring any attempt by the Committee Chairman to keep order.



The Battle Begins



The Battle Begins



The Battle Begins

- They then took turns testifying to the Committee, one after another, exaggerating about the work requirements they endured and their compensation.



Assistance at the State Level

- While the battle waged in City Council, RIHA simultaneously began meeting with the leadership of the RI Senate and House of Representatives to explore a state level solution.
- RIHA worked with House leadership to introduce a wage “uniformity” bill that prevented cities and towns from enacting their own minimum wage that differed from the RI or federal minimum wage.



Assistance at the State Level

- Ultimately, the newly inducted Speaker of the House, Nicholas Mattiello, included this bill in the proposed state budget.



Speaker of the House Nicholas
Mattiello



Back to the Battleground

The group continued to lobby the Providence City Council, ultimately persuading the Council to unanimously vote to place the minimum wage question on the ballot for November.



Providence City Council President Michael Solomon



Back to the Battleground

- The group also engaged in their own efforts at the state level, arguing the budget provision effectively neutered cities and towns of the ability to govern themselves.



Protesters wielding “Keep Decisions Local” signs



Battleground State House

- This led to an 11th hour amendment to the budget being proposed that would have removed the uniformity provision.
- Fortunately, this amendment was soundly defeated and the budget passed both the House and the Senate.



Hotel Workers' Hunger Strike

- Finally, in a last-ditch effort to prevent uniformity from being adopted, several hotel workers staged a hunger strike on the State House terrace to persuade Governor Lincoln Chafee to veto the budget.



Hotel Workers' Hunger Strike



Hotel Workers' Hunger Strike



Hotel Workers' Hunger Strike

- Governor Lincoln Chafee, stating through an aide that “sound economic policy for Rhode Island calls for a statewide minimum wage rather than a patchwork of wage thresholds,” signed the bill into law, thereby ending the hotel workers’ effort.



Gov. Lincoln Chafee





Dale J. Venturini

President/ CEO of RI Hospitality Association &
RI Hospitality Education Foundation

