

# HRG Hartford Restaurant Group

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Good Evening. My name is Philip Barnett and I'm one of the owners of The Hartford Restaurant Group which consists of the 6 **Wood-n-Taps** (located in: Hartford, Farmington, Southington, Rocky Hill, Vernon & Orange), **Agave Grill** (Downtown Hartford) and **TD Homers Grill** (Southington).

I'm sure many of you have heard that the restaurant business is one of the hardest industries to be successful in. You are 100% correct, it is very difficult! The failure rate is amongst the highest of any other industry in our state. We are the most likely industry in Connecticut to offer a young person his/her first job, employ a woman in her first management position, and to provide a job for a new American.

I haven't had the pleasure to meet each and every one of you but if I had I'm sure you would find that I'm a loving, caring person and absolutely philanthropic. I'd like to tell you a little story about my upbringing and let you know why I feel the way I do. When I was growing up I attended church, Sunday school and a youth group. Attendance of these, along with my parental guidance, instilled a sense of giving back to my community, and caring for others. When I considered being in the restaurant industry and owning my own business, I felt that need to do something for our local communities. I believed owning a business ensured that I could have an impact on giving back to those in need. Well, after 12 years of being self employed (since I was 24) I have made that a large focus. We at the Hartford Restaurant Group have given away more than \$100,000 to non-profit organizations. I encourage each of you to go online to [www.WoodnTap.com/community.htm](http://www.WoodnTap.com/community.htm) and see many of the different charities we have given to. We have also set up pages on our website to accept donations and sponsorship requests.

The reason I share this story is to let you know what kind of people we are. We are exceedingly generous. We opened our first Wood n Tap in 2002. Since then we have opened 7 other restaurants, providing approximately 500 jobs to people in our state. Given the right circumstances, we would like to continue to grow our business in Connecticut. The reality is, ~~SB 913~~ is unreasonable and not practical, and would most likely stunt any growth opportunities. I'm sure many of you here are saying, "Wow, paid sick leave sounds like a great idea" while not looking at the full picture. From the surface it sounds great but all the underlying challenges and expenses with this bill would be devastating to businesses. The restaurant industry does not want to get the general public sick. We have learned to self police and set up policies and procedures to ensure the safety of our staff and the public. Part of the reason people stay in this industry is because of the flexibility of each individual's schedule. If one of our team members is sick or their child is sick, it is generally very easy to swap, change, or get rid of a shift within seconds. In fact, everything is now web based and they can simply press a few buttons or make a phone call to make this happen. Please don't burden us with this extra layer of bureaucracy.



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For those of you that don't know, the costs of doing business in this state are among the highest in the nation. Compared to most other states, we have:

- Higher energy costs / utilities (the third highest in the nation)
- Higher insurance costs
- Higher minimum wage and therefore wage base, a lower tip credit
- Higher workers' compensation costs.
- I can go on and on but as a small state, we suffer unfair competition from restaurants in neighboring states where operating costs are lower.

The restaurant industry is in the "**Right Now**" business. This means if someone can't come in to work, we need to replace them with another employee which in turn would create a double expense.

There are many things we **can't** control in our industry.

- **Gas prices** going up. This will in turn increase the cost of goods, which we can't pass along to our guests because our market can't bear it.
- **The commodities market** is going through the roof with the floods in Australia, the drought in China and the arctic weather which has bombarded the US this winter.
- A 3.2 billion dollar deficit which will be in part put on the backs of businesses.
- The unemployment rate. Another huge increase in expense this year.

Although none of us here today can control any of the said costs above, there is one thing you can control.....That is NOT allowing SB 913 to become another mandate on businesses. This will make it 53 weeks of payroll while there are only 52 weeks of business and sales. This would in turn cost our restaurant group over \$126,000 per year.

I ask that you take what I've stated today very seriously and not impose this mandate on the backs of already struggling small business.

Kindly submitted,

Philip Barnett

Partner (Hartford Restaurant Group)

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