

By Tim Carman | May 18 at 7:27 PM

Executives for restaurant groups large and small pressed President Trump for more federal assistance and for more time to spend the relief money they already have during a White House meeting Monday ostensibly arranged to discuss how to safely reopen for businesses during a pandemic that has stretched into its third month.

Trump didn't signal whether he would provide restaurants with more cash, but he did boast that he has already "saved" the industry during a roundtable meeting in which he also [acknowledged taking hydroxychloroquine](#), the potentially dangerous anti-malaria drug, despite testing negative for covid-19.

Ten chefs and executives, representing chains as large as Burger King and restaurants as rarefied as Per Se in New York City, brought their economic concerns to the meeting as the president and many governors continue to push for reopening businesses, including the nation's estimated 650,000 restaurants. All the hospitality industry representatives were male, and mostly white, though the Independent Restaurant Coalition initially requested that North Carolina chef-restaurateur Katie Button represent the group. IRC co-founder Tom Colicchio, the man behind Crafted Hospitality, says someone at the White House rejected her. He didn't know who.

"We wanted a woman up there, and they said no," Colicchio told The Washington Post.

Instead, the IRC sent Will Guidara, who helped turn Eleven Madison Park into a three-star Michelin destination before parting ways with co-owner Daniel Humm last year. Guidara was there to promote a stabilization fund to help get the industry back on its feet during a period when restaurateurs are uncertain whether the public has the appetite for dining out again. Colicchio expected that when they reopen, restaurants would earn only 20 to 30 percent of their usual business, which he called unsustainable.

"There is a lot of expense that we're going to have to incur to sanitize the places. We're going to have to put a bunch of other things in place to open up," Colicchio said. "So we're opening up into a severely depressed market, and we need capital to kind of float the restaurants until business comes back.

"This is a point that I would have made if I were there," Colicchio continued. "If you want to put a stimulus package through to make sure the economy continues to grow and get through this, the best thing to use is the restaurant industry, because we employ 11 million people and because of all the farmers and fishermen and cheesemakers and winemakers that we support. Plus, the fact that 95 cents of every dollar that we take in goes out the door. That has a stimulative effect."

In the independent restaurant industry's view, a stabilization fund would serve it better than the Paycheck Protection Program, which requires owners to spend 75 percent on payroll over eight weeks, even as many restaurants aren't open or are operating at half capacity or less. (The PPP money converts to a loan if it's not used according to the terms.) "We've been fighting to make that

minimum of 24 weeks. According to a press pool report, the restaurant executives were unified in their request for the extension.



The image shows a screenshot of a tweet from Zachary Warmbrodt (@Zachary) posted 2 hours ago. The tweet is a reply to another tweet from @Zachary. The text of the tweet discusses the possibility of extending the eight-week window for spending PPP loans to 24 weeks, mentioning that Mnuchin is working on a "technical fix" with bipartisan support. Below the tweet, there is a timestamp of 18 4:24 PM - May 18, 2020, and a link to see Zachary Warmbrodt's other tweets.

Zachary Warmbrodt @Zachary · 2h
Replying to @Zachary
Asked about extending the eight-week window to spend PPP loans and have them forgiven, Mnuchin says he's working on a "technical fix" that has bipartisan support. Says he's not sure if it will be extended as long as 24 weeks, though, which is what lawmakers and restaurants want

Zachary Warmbrodt
@Zachary

Trump appeared struck by how unified restaurant industry reps were in asking for the PPP loan window to be extended to 24 weeks. "Did you guys meet before this or something?" Big moment for the new [@IndpRestaurants](#)

18 4:24 PM - May 18, 2020

[See Zachary Warmbrodt's other Tweets](#)

In addition to Guidara and Irby, participants included Texas and Tennessee restaurateur Tim Love, Jose Cil from Restaurant Brands International (Burger King, Popeyes), James Bodenstedt of MUY Restaurants (Taco Bell, Wendy's), Niren Chaudhary of Panera Bread, Tilman Fertitta of Landry's Inc., and chef-restaurateur Thomas Keller, who's also a member of the [White House's economic revival industry group](#). When the president took part in a conference call with restaurant executives in March, none were independent operators, so Colicchio said he was glad the IRC had a seat at the table this time around. An estimated [70 percent of restaurants are independents](#).

The statistics are not pretty: The National Restaurant Association says two out of three hospitality industry employees have been laid off or furloughed, totaling more than 8 million workers. Four in 10 restaurants are closed, the [association notes](#), and the industry is expected to lose \$240 billion in 2020.

OpenTable, the online reservation behemoth, has been [keeping up-to-date statistics](#) on the year-over-year numbers for seated diners in U.S. restaurants that use the platform. The data include not just online reservations but also phone reservations and walk-ins. From late March, after jurisdictions across the country closed down dining rooms, the number of seated diners has plummeted by more than 98 percent from last year, only rising above a 95 percent decline in the past few days as [restaurants begin to reopen](#).

On the White House side, the meeting was attended by, among others, Trump, Pence and Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump, assistants to the president. Treasury Department Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Labor Department Secretary Eugene Scalia also attended. Near the end of the long meeting, Trump took questions from reporters. During one back and forth, he offered this assessment of his administration's efforts to help the crippled restaurant industry.

“We’ve saved and we’ll continue to save the restaurant business,” he told those in the room, “and ultimately we’ll be paid back many, many times” in taxes.

Colicchio, who watched the proceedings on C-Span, said he was confounded by the statement. “I have no idea what it means,” Colicchio said. “He hasn’t saved anything yet.”

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