

INDEPENDENT RESTAURANT COALITION GUIDE TO CONGRESSIONAL OUTREACH



Know Who to Contact

Understanding who represents you in Congress—your U.S. Representative in the House and your two U.S. Senators—is essential because they are your direct connection to federal policymaking. These are the people empowered to introduce and vote on legislation, influence federal funding for local projects, and weigh in on key national issues.

When you know your elected officials, you can hold them accountable and make your voice heard through your feedback, votes, and civic engagement. It's a foundational step in democracy: speaking up works most effectively when you target the right audience. Plus, when officials are contacted by their own constituents, especially with timely and well-informed feedback, it often carries more weight.

To find out who represents you in the US Congress [follow this link](#)



Things to Remember

- Starting a conversation with a legislator can be intimidating, so nerves are natural, but it's important to remember that it is their job to listen to what you have to say.
- The restaurants industry impacts a large percentage of any lawmaker's constituency, so your voice matters to them!
- It's never a bad idea to give the maître d' treatment to every lawmaker ahead of your conversation. Research them like you would a guest - What have they previously supported? What are their interests, both personal and political? How do restaurants impact those?
- When looking for connections, use your whole network. It may be friends, family, past-coworkers/employees, or even regulars who have a connection with the person who you are trying to contact. Cold calling is great, but any personal connections you have can help get you a meeting faster!



Get to Know The Issues: The SEAT Act

The **Supporting Equal Access to Tables (SEAT) Act of 2025** (HR 3403), addresses the growing problem of unauthorized third-party reservation services that list, promote, or sell restaurant reservations without the consent of independent restaurants and bars. This practice disrupts operations, frustrates customers, and unfairly burdens small business owners with liabilities caused by actions outside their control. Independent restaurants across the country are suffering as third-party platforms use automated bots to secure reservations and resell them at inflated prices.

The SEAT Act provides a much-needed safeguard against these deceptive practices and ensures that the dining experience is transparent, seamless, and fair for restaurant owners, staff, and diners.

Key Components of the SEAT Act of 2025

- **Prohibition on Unauthorized Reservations:** The SEAT Act would prohibit third-party reservation services from listing, promoting, or selling reservations without a clear, written agreement with the restaurant.
- **Enforcement by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC):** The SEAT Act would treat violations as unfair or deceptive acts under the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Act. The FTC would be responsible for ensuring compliance with the SEAT Act, giving restaurants a path for recourse if unauthorized reservations occur.
- **Limiting Liability:** By prohibiting indemnification clauses, the SEAT Act would shield independent restaurants from financial and legal risks caused by unauthorized third-party services. This protection helps preserve the financial health of small businesses and ensures that accountability rests with those responsible.



Get to Know The Issues: Restaurant Service Charge Tax Fairness Act

The **Restaurant Service Charge Tax Fairness Act** seeks to address the growing adoption of service charges as a compensation model. Unlike tips, which are discretionary, service charges are mandatory fees designed to create a more equitable and stable wage distribution among both front- and back-of-house employees. The current tax code penalizes restaurants that adopt this model by treating service charges as regular income subject to full taxation, unlike tips, which are passed through without being taxed.

The Restaurant Service Charge Tax Fairness Act addresses this disparity by ensuring that service charges are treated more like tips under the tax code

- **Tax Treatment Alignment:** The Act proposes that service charges be excluded from FICA taxes. This would relieve restaurants of the financial burden associated with the current system, where service charges are taxed as regular revenue, ensuring a fairer distribution of income and benefits for employees.
- **Direct Distribution:** The Act would mandate that service charges be passed directly to non-management employees in the form of wages. This provision guarantees that service charge revenue benefits the workforce.
- **Cap on Exclusion:** The Act proposes capping the exclusion of service charges from FICA taxes at 25% to prevent abuse of the system while maintaining fiscal responsibility.
- **Overtime Exemption:** The Act includes a provision that would exclude service charges from the calculation of wages for overtime purposes, thereby preventing the double taxation of service charge income.



Get to Know The Issues: Immigration Reform

Given the critical role immigrants play in the success of independent restaurants and bars, immigration reform that facilitates legal pathways for employment is essential. Programs such as visa reforms for service and hospitality workers, alongside broader immigration solutions, are key to ensuring these small businesses continue to thrive, contributing to the local and national economy. Immigrant workers are not just filling jobs; they are building vibrant communities and driving economic growth. By supporting immigration policies that reflect the needs of the hospitality industry, Members of Congress can safeguard the future of independent restaurants and the millions of Americans they employ.

- According to the American Immigration Council, immigrants make up 22% of all U.S. workers in the food services industry, including restaurants and bars.
- The U.S. Small Business Administration reports that 29% of all new businesses in the hospitality sector are immigrant-owned. These businesses not only create jobs for American workers but also contribute to local economies through sales taxes, wages, and supplier relationships.
- Immigrant workers bring cultural diversity to the industry, contributing to the unique flavors and cuisines that make independent restaurants a vibrant part of communities across the U.S. This diversity not only attracts customers but also drives innovation, allowing small businesses to differentiate themselves and thrive in a competitive market.



Get to Know The Issues: Credit Card Competition Act

The passage of the **Credit Card Competition Act** is critical for the survival of independent restaurants and bars. With tight margins and increasing operating costs, independent businesses are especially vulnerable to rising swipe fees. Reducing these fees would allow restaurants to reinvest in their operations, retain employees, and keep prices affordable for consumers. By introducing competition into the credit card processing market, the act would give independent restaurants more control over their costs and provide much-needed financial relief.

The Credit Card Competition Act aims to level the playing field for small businesses by introducing the following key reforms:

- **Multiple Network Access:** The act would require banks to provide merchants with access to at least two unaffiliated networks for processing credit card transactions. This would break up the current dominance of Visa and Mastercard, allowing merchants to choose lower-cost processing options.
- **Fee Transparency:** Credit card processors would be required to disclose all fees associated with a transaction upfront. Increased transparency would allow restaurants to make more informed decisions about payment processing options.
- **Increased Competition:** By fostering competition among credit card networks, the act would drive down interchange fees, and encourage innovation, leading to more cost-effective payment solutions for small businesses.
- **Enhanced Consumer Protections:** The act would also introduce safeguards to protect consumers from hidden fees and deceptive practices in the credit card industry.



Write a Script

Prepare what you want to say in a way that feels personal, relays your story, and drives home the importance of this bill to you, your employees, and your community.

Include specifics like:

- Your restaurant name
- How long you've been in business
- How many people you employ
- The challenges your business is currently facing
- How the ____ Bill would help you, your team and the industry

Note: If you know another business owner from your community, whether its a fellow restaurant operator, or a supplier who is facing the same challenges, invite them to join and tell their story as well.



Be Ready for Questions

It is easy to be an expert on the key policy issues just follow the links below to access detailed fact sheets on each issue, outlining the impacts on the independent restaurant industry and the key provisions of related bills and legislative actions. These resources will ensure you're well-prepared for your call or meeting. Feel free to print them and keep them with you for quick reference—having this information on hand will help you advocate confidently and effectively.

- [The SEAT Act](#)
- [Restaurant Service Charge Tax Fairness](#)
- [Immigration Reform](#)
- [Credit Card Competition Act](#)



Fast Facts About the Industry

- Independent restaurants employ 11 million people across the United States, making up nearly 60% of the foodservice industry's workforce. Restaurants are among the largest employers of youth, providing entry level jobs that build valuable skills in customer service, teamwork, and leadership.
- Independent restaurants contribute billions of dollars annually in federal, state, and local taxes through income taxes, payroll taxes, sales taxes, and property taxes.
- Independent restaurants contribute to the U.S. wine industry's \$70 billion market, acting as primary sales outlets for small and local vineyards.
- Nearly 40% of the U.S. craft beer market is supported by restaurants, helping drive the \$30 billion craft beer industry.
- Independent restaurants contribute over \$60 billion to the U.S. agricultural economy by sourcing fresh, locally produced ingredients.
- The broader supply chain benefits significantly from restaurants' purchases of equipment, packaging, and other essential goods, contributing an estimated \$500 billion annually to the U.S. economy.
- Independent restaurants help fuel the \$278 billion U.S. tourism economy, as tourists are more likely to visit independently owned restaurants for authentic, regional cuisine. In cities with strong food cultures, independent restaurants are responsible for a significant portion of tourist spending on dining.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of the Treasury. Wine Institute. WineAmerica. Brewers Association. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE). Foodservice Equipment Distributors Association (FEDA)



Follow Up

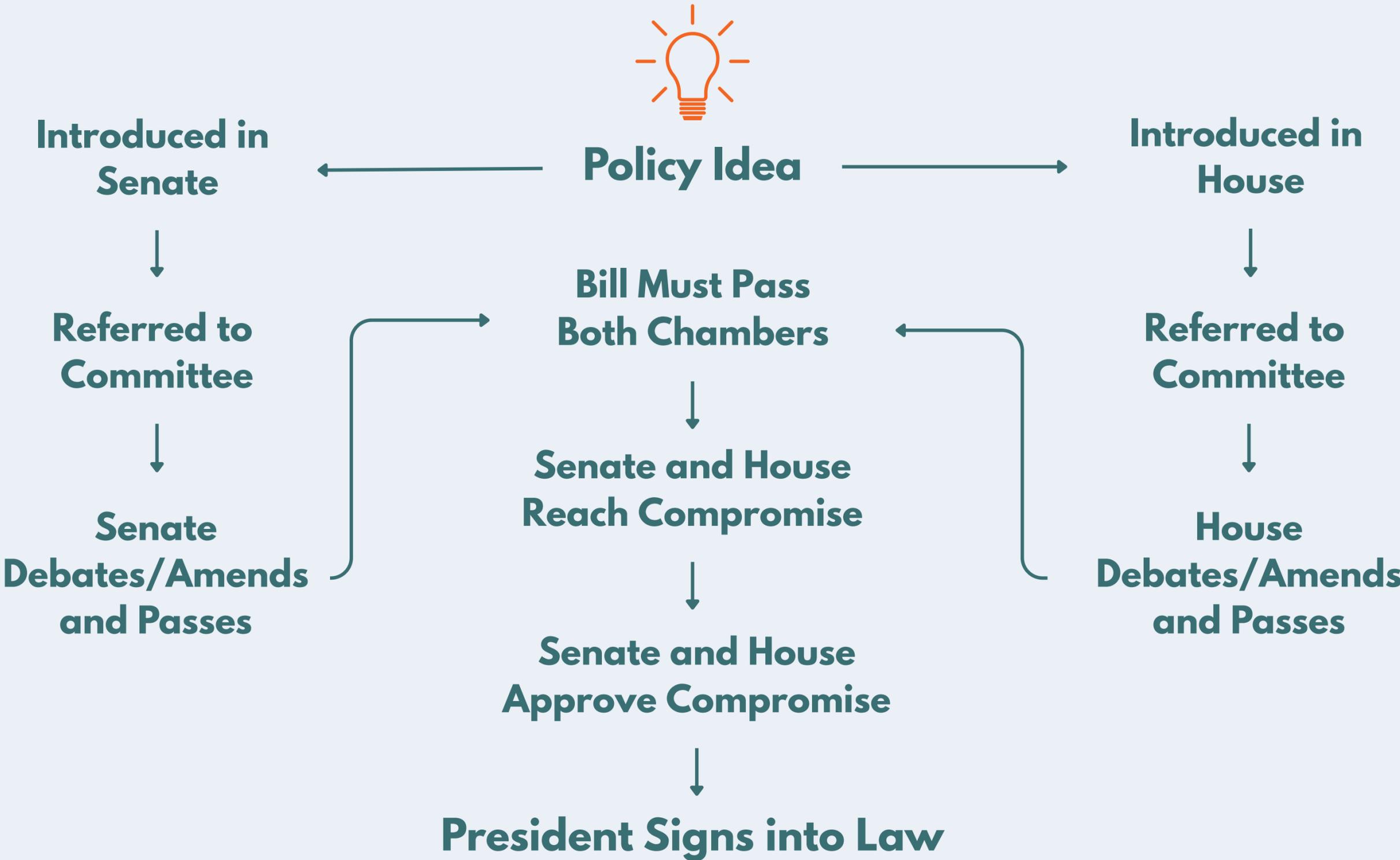
Follow up with thank you notes and tweets, and get your friends, neighbors, and colleagues to do the same. Showing appreciation for your legislators time and attention to your concerns, strengthens relationships, and encourages ongoing support for your cause. Acknowledging their efforts can make a lasting impact and keep your issues on their radar.

Here are three ways to say thank you:

1. Send a **personalized email** expressing gratitude for their time and attention to your issue.
2. Post a **public thank you** on social media by tagging them and sharing how their support makes a difference.
3. Write a **handwritten note** to make a thoughtful and memorable impression.



How An Idea Becomes A Law



THANK YOU!

**contact hello@independentrestaurantcoalition.com
with questions or for additional assistance**

