



THINKSTOCK

It is estimated that around one-quarter of restaurant workers are born outside of the U.S.

The Impact of a Day Without Immigrants

ON FEBRUARY 16, RESTAURANTS AROUND THE NATION, INCLUDING THOSE RUN BY SOME OF THE INDUSTRY'S TOP CHEFS, SHUT DOWN TO SUPPORT THE CAUSE.

By Alex Dixon | March 2017 | Employee Management

As a nationwide movement to highlight the impact of immigrants swept the country earlier this month, many businesses closed down either voluntarily or due to a lack of staff.

At the center of impacted establishments were restaurants, an industry in which around one-quarter of workers are born outside of the U.S.

Chef José Andrés closed five of his restaurants in Maryland, D.C., and Virginia in support of the cause, and was joined by other restaurateurs across the country, including Rick Bayless.

“For three decades, we’ve been a place that has welcomed, respected, and promoted our immigrant staff, friends, and restaurant family,” Bayless said in a statement announcing closures of his restaurants Frontera Grill, Topolobampo, Xoco, and Fonda Frontera. Bayless’ restaurants Cruz Blanca and Leña Brava remained open that day, with 10 percent of revenue going to the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights.

The protests also closed several McDonald's locations, though it is unclear whether this was out of solidarity for A Day Without Immigrants, which took place February 16, or if those locations were unable to operate without the employees.

"Imagine what would happen at your company if half [or even a quarter] of your colleagues disappeared one day, never to be seen or heard from again," says Becki Young, a business immigration attorney and head of Hammond Young's hospitality practice. "That's the premise of the protest, and the movie 'A Day Without A Mexican,' which provided the inspiration. I think it's a very clever way to make a very important point."

Young says that the Trump administration's focus on immigration enforcement has concerned many restaurant operators, including those who work with Hammond Young to ensure that their workers have proper documentation, seek to bring workers here legally, and ensure those workers maintain legal work authorization.

"The administration's focus on enforcement creates a worry about an increase in workplace raids. The Muslim travel ban impacted the travel of some of our clients' employees and created uncertainty about the processing of benefits, such as employment authorization documents, for individuals from the seven countries," Young says. "And the ban on refugee admissions has cut off an important source of documented workers, as many refugees find their first U.S. jobs in the foodservice industry."

While action on these points remains to be seen, the National Restaurant Association has said that Trump's background in the hospitality industry makes it likely he will push for proposed tax cuts and regulatory reform, and that the industry "may see relief in some of the burdensome requirements imposed on [businesses]."