

Testimony of Ms. Cheryl Straughter
U.S. Senate Committee on Finance: Fiscal Responsibility and Economic
Growth Subcommittee
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Senator Warren, Ranking Member Cassidy, and members of the Committee, I want to thank you for allowing me to testify today.

I am not a billionaire, or an ultra-millionaire. I'm not even close. During my life, there have been times where I worried about my status as a thousand-air. I'm the chef and owner of Soleil, a small restaurant located in Boston, MA. I am also a social worker, and member of the Boston Black Hospitality Coalition.

I opened my restaurant in 2018, in an area of Boston called Nubian Square. This was a thriving commercial district when I was younger, and I fondly remember shopping with my mother Shirley and boarding the elevated train that once operated all the way downtown.

Over the years, disinvestment the community led businesses and families to leave. But when an opportunity arose to take over a vacant space in the neighborhood, I knew that I wanted to be part of the future of Nubian Square.

I'm proud to run this small business. Along the way to my current role, I've been an employee, a student, and a caregiver. I work hard for myself, my family, my employees, and my community, and I care deeply about all of their well-being.

And that's why it's so important that we have a fair tax system.

I can't say that I enjoy paying taxes, but I am proud to pay them. The revenue collected from our taxes is what we use to pay for the government services we care about: schools, healthcare, Social Security.

I value those services, and I know they make my community and our nation better. But the unfairness of the current tax system is what drives people crazy.

At Soleil, and I've got eight employees that work for me. Their incomes are reported to the IRS, and they pay their taxes based on that income, including paying a percentage of their income for Social Security and Medicare. But I know the ultra-rich are different. Their income doesn't usually come from a paycheck, it comes from investments and other holdings. That means that they often pay less in taxes than my own employees. And I know the ultra-rich have a bunch of ways to hide their income or avoid paying taxes on it. That is unfair.

Asking ultra-millionaires and billionaires to pay a small percent of their massive wealth is a no-brainer. If you have a huge fortune, and you benefit from all that this country has provided, you ought to be paying your fair share. It's more than fair that they be asked to pay a small percent of their wealth – and I just can't understand why the wealthiest and luckiest people in the world would be complaining about it being such a hardship.

It's the same with the big businesses that I compete with. They're able to use their resources to lower the amount of tax they pay – like hiring expensive lawyers and accountants, or shifting some of their profits overseas. Many Fortune 500 companies don't pay any taxes at all! It's hard enough to compete and run a business during a pandemic – it's nearly impossible to do that when the tax system is rigged against you.

Our country has many needs right now. A fairer tax system would give us the opportunity to provide affordable child care, create a better education system, and repair our roads. We could provide more support to small businesses, especially those owned by African Americans and other groups that do not have easy access to financing, and make housing more affordable.

These are important national priorities, and they're also things that I want for my family. I know that these investments will make our communities better and stronger, and help our economy grow. That will be good for me, good for my employees, good for my customers, and good for my business and businesses all over the country.

I am happy to answer any of your questions. Thank you for inviting me to today's hearing, and thank you for your work to make our tax system fairer and our nation stronger.