

By Justin Coleman

WASHINGTON D.C., 19 April 2017- Raul, 32, from Puebla, Mexico is one of the many undocumented Mexican immigrants that keep D.C's restaurant industry going. Raul, whose name and employer have been not disclosed to protect his identity, has been working as a line cook at a prominent Adam's Morgan Restaurant for three years. Raul works approximately 70 hours a week, sometimes 15 hours a day cooking lunch, dinner, and weekend brunches. While his wages might not be a lot for American standards, his weekly paycheck ranging from \$300 to \$500 goes a long way back in Mexico.

“We make money. The money we make here might not be a lot here, but it is a lot of money in Mexico. 300, 400, 500 in a week in Mexico, it's a lot.”

Many D.C. dining establishments rely heavily on the services of undocumented Mexican immigrants like Raul. Chefs, line cooks, servers, bussers, and dishwashers work countless hours to ensure that customer service, quality, and efficiency are met. But, the first 100 days of the Donald Trump presidency have created a future of uncertainty for many of D.C's undocumented, Mexican workers as the current administration works to increase deportations and implement stricter immigration laws. United States President Donald Trump's strict immigration reform presents consequences not only for the thousands of undocumented Mexican immigrants working in the district's restaurants but, for tens of thousands of their family members back in Mexico who rely on remittances from D.C each month.

Raul's undocumented status here in the United States ensures that he is paid below the line. Some may say that he works long hours for little pay. Yet, his wages here exceed the wages he was making in Mexico by twice, even three fold. Back in Puebla, Raul spent his days working as an agricultural laborer working in greenhouses or “invernaderos”, picking tomatoes and fruits for as little as \$3 an hour. Raul explains Mexico's unequal wealth distribution as one of

the reasons why Mexican immigrants continue to cross the border each year to send back money to family members in Mexico.

“People like President Pena Nieto, if they are born rich, they stay rich, they have all the opportunities to success while everyone else cannot,” Raul said.

A February, 2016 Wall Street Journal article reports that nearly \$70 billion in remittances were sent from the United States to Latin American and Caribbean countries in 2015. NBC News reported that \$25 billion in remittances were sent from the United States to Mexico that same year. Raul is grateful for the family members he has here in the United States, one of them being his sister who lives in Indiana. Yet, he mentions several key members back home whom he tries to help out.

“My mother, she is old, too old to come here. She’s back in Puebla so I still have her to think about.” Whether it be emotional or monetary support, immigrants like Raul play a vital part in family dynamics hundreds, even thousands of miles away from their home cities and town.

President Trump’s proposed legislation regarding deportations, wire freezes, and seizures threatens many undocumented Mexican immigrant abilities to send back remittances to their families. In a March 31st, 2016 memo to The Washington Post, Trump proposes several provisions he believes will help Mexico pay for a border wall along U.S. southern border with Mexico. These reforms include cancelling visas, visas fees, and a revision to the status of wire transfers.

“ No alien may wire money outside of the United States unless the alien first provides a document establishing his lawful presence in the United States.” The memo, produced in the midst of the Trump’s campaign, estimated that a redefinition of wire transfer regulations would create an abrupt protest from America’s southern neighbors.

“\$24 billion dollars a year in remittances from Mexican nationals working in the United States. The majority of that amount comes from illegal aliens. It serves as de facto welfare for

poor families in Mexico. There is no significant social safety net provided by the state in Mexico.” In creating these regulations, it seems as though the Trump Administration would create obstacles great enough for the Mexican immigrant population and its government to act. Since assuming office, President Trump’s administration has done little to freeze the wire transfers that have proven to be vital for families living back in Mexico. Yet, President Donald Trump’s inconsistent approach to immigration policy means that undocumented immigrants like Raul should exercise a heightened level of caution. His future status here in the United States and the remittances he sends back to family members are in jeopardy.