

Local Perspective

# It's okay to hate Trump staffers, but let them eat their cake (and cheese plate)



Passersby gather to take photos in front of the Red Hen Restaurant in Lexington, Va. on Saturday, June 23, 2018. (Daniel Lin/AP)



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I'd be lying if I didn't admit to a little schadenfreude when Sarah Huckabee Sanders was asked to leave a restaurant over the weekend based on the content of her character.

Sanders, after all, gave the thumbs-up [to the idea of](#) a bakery hanging out a sign denying wedding cakes to gay couples.

This happened in early June, after the [Supreme Court sided with a baker](#) who doesn't believe in same-sex marriage and who refused to make a wedding cake for a gay couple. The ruling didn't say the Supremes are down with the cakeman's beliefs, though. It scolded the Colorado Civil Rights Commission for

being biased instead of impartial when it looked at the baker's case.

*[Pride is profitable, check out the businesses that figured out inclusion means ka-ching]*

But those are details. And details — plus facts — are unfashionable these days.

So the Trump administration hailed the nuanced ruling as a way for religion to excuse bigotry. No wonder the gay staff members at the Red Hen in Lexington, Va., didn't feel great about serving a cheese plate to the woman who as press secretary contorted the meaning of that complex ruling.

Karma, baby. Right?

Not so fast. I ditched that little glee party pretty quickly, and we all should consider doing the same, whether we love the staff at the Red Hen restaurant or want to “Amen” the religious cakemaker.

Because this is dangerous territory for our society.

When American businesses stop serving people they don't like — whether it's because of their politics, their jobs, the color of their skin, whom they love or whom they worship — we're breaking the social compact of a civilized society.

In the same week that Sanders was asked to leave the Red Hen before getting to dig into her high-dollar farm-to-table meal, these things also happened in the land of the free:

- A transgender woman was [asked to leave](#) a lively Cuban restaurant in downtown Washington for trying to use the women's bathroom.

- A pharmacist in Arizona [cited moral objections](#) and refused a woman's prescription for miscarriage medication.
- A black man was banned from shopping at his neighborhood grocery store in Maine after [asking the clerk](#) why both he and his wife were asked to show their IDs to buy a bottle of sake.
- The folks at a Louisiana Burger King [refused to take the order](#) of two hungry sheriff's deputies because they don't like cops.

How soon before I have to fill out a questionnaire making sure my personal philosophy aligns with my mechanic's before he works on my brakes?

In most of these cases, the businesses were wrong because their customers belong to a legally protected class. That means that if someone is discriminated against because of their race, color, religion, national origin or ancestry, sex, age, physical or mental disability, veteran status, genetic information or citizenship, federal law has got their backs.

In the case of Sanders, well, obfuscators, abusers of the free press, indignant sneerers and promoters of racially biased policies are not a protected class. So the Red Hen was probably in the clear legally.

And so was the Alexandria gym that [revoked the membership](#) of white nationalist Richard Spencer after a Georgetown University professor publicly shamed him for his bigotry during his workout.

*[\[Even hate speech is what democracy look like\]](#)*

Those folks may be morally right — especially the gay staff members at the Red Hen who feel their rights are threatened by the work Sanders does.

But the actions aren't ethical and fair business practices.

Because I think it opens the door to the kind of abuse Sanders encouraged in the wedding cake case.

Where does it end? Will we have to show our voter registration cards at the hair salon? Can a doctor refuse to perform surgery on a white nationalist who comes into the E.R. after a car crash? Can that mechanic boot me because he doesn't like The Washington Post?

From Kentucky county clerk Kim Davis, who famously [wouldn't do her job](#) and issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples a few years ago, to the Virginia hardware store clerk who didn't want a Boy Scout [in his shop last month](#) because the Scouts allow gay members, the imposition of morals, values and fears in the workplace can hurt us all.

*[\[No, those weren't the good old days for everyone\]](#)*

If your religion doesn't believe in same-sex marriage, then marry the opposite sex. If you believe that Sanders is helping in the destruction of American democracy, then don't vote for her boss or anyone associated with him. Knock yourselves out, protest on public streets, express how you feel in public, let them know how repulsive the turns our country have taken are.

But do not slide back into an atmosphere where businesses have free rein to discriminate.

In the 1970s, D.C. officials saw the peril of political discrimination when they listed it on Page 9 of the typewritten [Human Rights Act of 1977](#), where subsection "y" names "political affiliation" as a reason you can't discriminate against someone.

This doesn't mean that folks shouldn't be free to let their opinions fly when they're out in public.

The shunning and shaming of Trump staff has become sport in Washington. Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen left a Mexican restaurant in D.C. when protesters hounded her, chanting "Shame! Shame!" Chief Orchestrator of Immigrant Family Separation Stephen Miller was also at a trendy Mexican restaurant earlier in the week when other patrons shouted him out as a "fascist." (Funny, their love of Mexican food.) Even outside of Washington, folks who support Trump have been publicly shamed. Last week, Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi was shouted down at the movies.

Those were individuals, doing what Americans have always done — speak their minds. But for businesses to decide who can and can't be a patron, well, that may take us somewhere none of us wants to go.

Two years ago, some Mexican restaurants in Texas hung signs telling Trump supporters they are not welcome. "You can't have your taco and eat it, too," one said.

I get it. It is repulsive to serve people you disagree with. As a waitress, I had to serve the mean girls of high school when they sat at my station. As a reporter, I've had to interview rapists, child molesters, murderers, racists and abusers, among other loathsome creatures. But we choose our professions. And when we decide to work in a field that is a part of our social fabric, then we owe our customers the goods and services we advertise.

David Axelrod, one of the chief strategists for President Barack Obama's campaigns, had little use for the Red Hen action, too.

“Disgusted with this admin’s policies? Organize, donate, volunteer, VOTE!” was part of his [tweets](#) about the incident.

“Rousting Cabinet members from restaurants is an empty and, ultimately, counter-productive gesture that won’t change a thing.”

Take action, yes. But do it where it counts.