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April 8, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President,

It was extremely gratifying to small businesses like the neighborhood dry cleaner, to hear your recent remarks at the swearing in of Maria Contreras- Sweet as head of the Small Business Administration, praising 'small businesses as the lifeblood of our economy'. Imagine then my distress when a day later during your remarks about Pay Fairness, you segued into a smear on the quintessential small business, the dry cleaner, by suggesting you should be targeting them for gender biased pricing.

Mr. President, for dry cleaning services, gender pricing is a myth, and we can prove it with the math!

We do not blame you for your misconception about how shirt processing services are priced by cleaners, we hold the media responsible for perpetuating the myth. We hope that once you understand the math, you will follow up your national conversation about dry cleaners by publicly correcting the mistaken impression that the media has helped to foster among many Americans, including our First Family.

As an industry, dry cleaners do not charge more for a woman's shirt than a man's shirt, they charge more for a hand ironed shirt than they do a machine pressed shirt. If you check your own dry cleaning bill, you'll find that YOU pay more for the laundering and finishing of your hand ironed tuxedo shirt, than you do for the automated processing of your everyday traditional dress shirt! The price is in the math as calculated by the labor required not the gender of the client!

Simple math. Hand ironing takes more time and requires more skill, and therefore costs the cleaner more to produce. Because it costs more to produce, he charges more for the work.

A man's traditional, full cut 100% cotton shirt is generally machine finished at the rate of 20 - 30 shirts per hour. And the cleaner charges accordingly. If the First Lady bought her shirts in the men's department, she would pay the same price you do for laundering and

finishing because the shirt would then be suitable for automated, machine finishing, as opposed to hand ironing.

Now, the First Lady may say, a man's shirt won't fit her properly. The neck and cuffs will be too big. The sleeves will be too long. There will be too much fabric for her to comfortably tuck it into pants or a slim cut skirt. And she's right. But the dry cleaner's automated finishing equipment is made to 'fit' all those design features inherent in a man's shirt. So, a slimmer cut, narrower neck and cuffs, shorter sleeved shirt WILL NOT fit on the machine! The woman's shirt must be hand ironed. If you tried to wear one of Mrs. Obama's blouses – it would not fit you properly, and if you tried to squeeze into it – you might even damage it! The same thing happens on the automated equipment – her shirt either doesn't fit, so it must be hand ironed. OR... the trim makes it unsuitable for automated finishing, just like your tuxedo shirt.

Now, you may ask, why don't manufacturers make a machine to press women's shirts? The answer is in the economics or rather uneconomics in the scale of production.

The number of simply cut (no frills like your tuxedo shirt) women's shirts that are hanging in the nation's closets are a small fraction of the number of simple men's dress shirts. Like most male professionals, you wear a shirt most every day. That means you have lots of shirts and by extension your cleaner has lots of men's shirts to launder and press for you, and others like you. By contrast, how often does the First Lady or your average American woman wear a simple, man-tailored shirt. The photo below tells the story, and the answer is not nearly as often as their male counterparts.



We will be posting a video on YOUTUBE later this week that will demonstrate the process. Why the television media has never seen fit to educate the American public on this issue by running a similar video, I cannot understand. Hopefully, now that you

understand the terrible injustice that has been done to the nation's dry cleaners, and have made the issue part of the national conversation, you will see how you were misled and take steps to undo the hurt and damage that has been inflicted on fair minded, hard working small businesses.

I'd like to invite you on your next trip to New York to visit a cleaner with us, bring your shirt and the First Lady's and we'll show you first hand what we're talking about. Myth vs. Math.

I hope you'll take the first public opportunity that presents itself to right the wrong you've inadvertently done the nation's hard working dry cleaners by setting the record straight. You now have everyone talking and thinking about it, and this is the perfect time for cleaners to have the truth told to the American public.

Thank you.

Cordially,

Nora P. Nealis
Executive Director

cc. Maria Contreras- Sweet