2021 Annual Meeting of Shareholders Q&A Responses

Below are the responses from Darden Restaurants, Inc., Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Gene Lee, to questions that were submitted by shareholders during the Company's Annual Meeting of Shareholders, which was held virtually on September 22, 2021.

Q1. Could you share more information about the process to measure and report on scope 3 emissions and to set science-based targets for scopes 1-3?

A. We are in the process of completing our scope 3 assessment. Once that data has been evaluated, we will begin the work necessary to develop science-based targets. We expect that work to happen this fiscal year.

Q2. How is Darden moving forward in addressing the worker shortage? It seems to us raising wages is an obvious solution? Are you considering this?

A. The employment environment continues to remain challenging, as I stated in my prepared remarks, we have been investing in our employees since 2018 we have put in $275 million. We will continue to look at our employment proposition and we will adjust as necessary. I will be making some more comments on the employment situation tomorrow morning.

Q3. The cash wage policy that Darden has adopted has reportedly led to employees being paid subminimum wages and relying on customers to tip to bring wages to the federal minimum wage. Nonprofit One Fair Wage conducted a survey in March and April of Darden employees, of which 200 responded. 20% of those workers said they have not received tips or additional wages to bring them up to minimum wage in their states. Of the tipped workers, 36% said they received less in tips than other workers and 20% said they received lower tips due to their race and/or gender. Critics say that a tipped wage increases sexual harassment and creates a gap in wages between employees of color and white employees. Given this sentiment and the effects of cash wages affecting POC in particular, how is Darden planning to attract and retain workers in its restaurants amid the labor shortage?

A. Well, as I mentioned in my prepared comments, we are focused on improving our employment proposition and we continue to invest in our people. And I believe that a lot of the statistics that you mentioned in that question are not true. Our team members are always brought up to the minimum wage if they don't earn that and our average wage for our team members is well above any minimum wage. When we look at the average wage for our servers we are pretty close to twenty-two and a half dollars per hour. For us to be successful we have to attract the best workforce that we can possibly attract and we believe that we have the best employment proposition in the industry and we believe that our pay practices are the best in the industry and I think that we can see that in all of our data: we have the best retention in the industry, and I think that we are at this point in time attracting the best team members that we can to deliver the great guest experiences that I talked about in my prepared remarks.

Q4. My name is Marcela Pinilla, Director of Sustainable Investing at Zevin Asset Management. Research shows that male and white workers continue to fare better than female, African American, Asian and Hispanic workers when it comes to earnings and quality of life. This has been especially augmented during the pandemic. Given its pledge to drive diversity and inclusion in the workplace, how does Darden consider the unique needs for women and how will it respond to the needs of especially women of color, who have had largely had more difficulty going back to work and remaining employed?

A. Ensuring an inclusive and diverse workplace is at the very heart of Darden and all of our brands. Today fifty percent of our hourly team members have been people of color or women. Over the past three years well over fifty percent of our promotions into management have been women. When you look at representation throughout our company we are leaders in our industry we continue to be focused on creating an inclusive and diverse workforce and we continue to focus on finding ways to continue to help from an education standpoint and training standpoint to further careers. We wake up every day trying to ensure that we have a great environment for everybody that works for us and provide an incredible opportunity for growth. I think one of the things that I am most proud of is the number of people that work their way up through our system from hourly employee and have the opportunity to become leaders in our management workforce and the training and development that they get throughout the years for them to be able to achieve that. And when you look at our representation and our company, you can see that women and people of color are excelling in our business.