ABL Friday HAPPY HOUR

July 24, 2026

Welcome to your **ABL Friday Happy Hour** ... *894 words* ... *3-4 minutes*. Here's the latest on legislative policy, industry developments, and other news affecting beverage alcohol retailers.

1. Congress Heads Into August with Major Business Unfinished

Congress wrapped up its July work period with the House advancing several significant measures, but many major legislative issues remain unresolved as lawmakers leave for the August recess. The Senate did not take up most House-passed legislation, while negotiations continue on annual appropriations, the National Defense Authorization Act, surface transportation reauthorization, the Farm Bill, and other must-pass measures ahead of the September 30 deadline.

- **Why it matters:** September's legislative calendar is expected to be exceptionally compressed, leaving Congress just a few weeks to address multiple expiring authorities and funding deadlines. For ABL, that means many priority issues will likely depend on whether they can be attached to larger legislative vehicles. If Congress cannot clear its September workload, many of those debates could slip into a post-election lame-duck session.

2. Comprehensive Federal Hemp Framework Introduced

Reps. Andy Barr (R-KY) and Angie Craig (D-MN) this week introduced the bipartisan Lawful Hemp Protection Act (H.R. 9830), a proposal to establish the first comprehensive federal regulatory framework for hemp-derived cannabinoid products. The bill would prohibit synthetic intoxicating cannabinoids, establish FDA oversight, impose nationwide age-21 restrictions, create federal manufacturing, labeling, testing, and taxation standards, preserve state authority to adopt stricter laws, and establish a federally regulated three-tier distribution system for hemp-derived beverages. Bill Text.

- **Why it matters:** The legislation represents the most thorough Congressional effort to date to address the intoxicating hemp marketplace. Consistent with ABL's principles, the proposal seeks to distinguish lawful hemp products from synthetic intoxicants while emphasizing age restrictions, product testing, consumer protections, responsible retailing, and state regulatory authority. The bill serves as another milestone in the congressional debate over the future of federal hemp policy and intoxicating THC beverages.

3. Craft Spirits Shipping Bill Introduced in the House

Rep. Greg Steube (R-FL) has introduced the Craft Distilled Spirits Direct-to-Consumer Shipping Act of 2026 (H.R. 9767), which seemingly intends to create a federal framework allowing qualifying craft distilleries producing no more than 250,000 gallons annually to ship distilled spirits directly to consumers across state lines, provided both the shipping and receiving states permit the practice. The legislation limits eligibility to independently owned distilleries. Bill Text.

- **Why it matters:** Although the bill claims to preserve state authority by requiring both the originating and destination states to allow direct shipment, ABL is reviewing the proposal to better understand its interaction with existing federal law and state alcohol regulatory systems. Questions remain about how the legislation would operate in practice, including its relationship to current statutes, its definitions of qualifying craft distilleries, and whether it would meaningfully change the existing legal framework for interstate spirits shipping.

4. Texas-Sized Success

ABL was proud to join the Texas Package Stores Association's 79th Annual Convention this week. Independent beverage retailers from across the Lone Star State gathered for education, networking and one of the industry's largest trade shows. A special thank you goes to Lance Lively and Christy DeClairmont for organizing an outstanding convention and for the warm Texas hospitality. Congratulations also to Austin Keith of Pinkie's on concluding nearly two decades of exceptional service as TPSA President. It was especially meaningful to have ABL President Nick Fede in attendance to support ABL's Texas members and reinforce the relationship between ABL and TPSA.

- **Why it matters:** Strong state associations like TPSA are the backbone of ABL. Bringing retailers together to share ideas, strengthen relationships and engage with industry partners helps ensure independent beverage licensees remain informed, connected and prepared to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead.

5. UK Whisky Tariffs Eliminated; Broader Tariff Relief Still Sought

The Trump Administration announced it will eliminate tariffs on UK whiskies as part of the Section 301 forced labor tariff action taking effect July 25. ABL joined its Toasts Not Tariffs coalition partners in welcoming the decision, noting that removing these tariffs benefits not only consumers but also the thousands of American importers, distributors, retailers, restaurants, and bars that depend on transatlantic beverage alcohol trade. The coalition also urged the Administration to eliminate tariffs on all imported wines and spirits.

- **Why it matters:** The removal of tariffs on UK whiskies is a positive step for retailers and the broader hospitality industry, but many imported wine and spirits remain subject to tariffs. ABL will continue working through the Toasts Not Tariffs coalition to support retailers and reduce unnecessary trade barriers that increase costs across the beverage alcohol supply chain.

6. New 50% Tariffs Announced on Canadian Beverage Alcohol

President Trump has announced a 50% tariff on Canadian spirits, wine, and beer, effective August 19, under Section 338 of the Tariff Act of 1930. The action comes in response to Canada's continued removal of U.S. beverage alcohol products from provincial retail shelves and – should it go into effect next month – mark a significant escalation in the ongoing U.S.-Canada trade dispute.

- **Why it matters:** Canada is one of the United States' most important beverage alcohol trading partners. While ABL supports efforts to restore access for American products to the Canadian market, additional tariffs risk prolonging a cycle of retaliation that increases costs and uncertainty for importers, distributors, retailers, and consumers on both sides of the border.