

ABL INSIDER

A PUBLICATION OF AMERICAN BEVERAGE LICENSEES

LEADING

A Message from the New ABL President

*Rhode Island's Nick Fede, Jr.
elected to lead the ABL Board*

PAGE 3

SPECIAL REPORT

Hemp at a Crossroads

*What happens this fall in Congress
could decide the industry's future*

PAGES 5-6

FEATURE

Annual Meeting in Louisville a Success

*On- and off-premise retailers,
industry gathered April 18-20*

PAGES 11-15

PLUS

*Partner Perspective
Policy Report
Legal Update
And More*



ABL INSIDER

A PUBLICATION OF AMERICAN BEVERAGE LICENSEES

FOUNDED IN 2010 / VOL. 11, NO. 1
SUMMER 2026
WWW.ABLUSA.ORG

Table of Contents	2
Leading	3
A Message from the ABL President	Nick Fede, Jr., President, ABL
Where We Stand	4
Playing the Long Game	John Bodnovich, Executive Director, ABL
Special Report	5-6
Hemp at a Crossroads	
Policy Notebook	7-8
Swipe Fees, Penny Policy & More...	
Legal Brief(ly)	9
7 th Circuit Briefed; ABL Op/Ed	
Association News	10
ABL in Action	
Feature	11-15
ABL Annual Meeting A Success	
New Officers Elected for 2026-2027	
Retailers of the Year Honored	
Scenes from Louisville	
ABL Annual Meeting Partners	
Partner Perspective	16
Spotlight on ServSafe Alcohol	Trevor Estelle, Vice President, ServSafe
Essay	17
Keep the World Cup Vibe Alive	
Membership	18
Stronger Together	
Events	19
On the Calendar	

ISSN# 2331-6594

(c) 2026 American Beverage Licensees.

All rights reserved. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced by any means, in whole or in part, without the prior written consent of the publisher.

Published by:

American Beverage Licensees | 5101 River Rd, Suite 108 | Bethesda, MD 20816 | (301) 656-1494 | www.ablusa.org

Editor | John Bodnovich

A Message from the ABL President

It is my distinct honor and privilege to write to you as the newly elected President of American Beverage Licensees, the preeminent national trade association for retail beverage alcohol license holders.

My first act as President is to express my sincere gratitude to my predecessor, Bobby Greenawalt, for his four years of dedicated service leading ABL.

Bobby's leadership guided our association through a rapidly evolving alcohol marketplace—one that was, and continues to be, shaped by the challenges and lessons of the post-COVID environment.

His ability to bring people together and empower them to lead from their strengths may be his greatest legacy. Without his mentorship and support, I would not be in the position I am in today.

I greatly value Bobby's friendship and look forward to continuing to learn from him. We are fortunate to have had Bobby Greenawalt in our corner. The alcohol beverages business, more than most industries, is built on relationships and people.

That spirit was on full display during our Annual Meeting in Louisville, Kentucky. ABL staff—led by Senior Director Susan Day Duffy and Executive Director John Bodnovich—planned an exceptional multiday event filled with insight, engagement, and meaningful opportunities to connect.

They set the stage for success, and our members delivered. Our time together was a true celebration of independent beverage alcohol retailers and the integrity of the three-tier system.



NICK FEDE, JR. of Kingstown Liquor Mart in North Kingstown, Rhode Island is the President of American Beverage Licensees.

We look forward to sharing details about next year's meeting and building on the strong momentum we have created. Thank you to everyone who helped make it such a success.

“My great uncle Nick served as Treasurer of NLSA more than fifty years ago and I am extremely proud of that heritage.”

I am a third-generation beverage alcohol retailer and a third-generation advocate for independent alcohol licensees.

My grandfather and great uncle opened their first store in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1952 and soon thereafter became co-founders of the Rhode Island Liquor Stores Association, a member organization of the National Liquor Stores Association—one of ABL's predecessor organizations.

My great uncle Nick served as Treasurer of NLSA more than fifty years ago and I am extremely proud of that heritage.

Being surrounded today by extraordinary role models—former Presidents Warren Scheidt, JJ Moran, David Jabour, and Steve Morris, among many others—connects me not only professionally, but personally, to the generations that built and sustained this association. It is our responsibility to honor that legacy by building upon the important work of those who came before us.

The real work begins now, and I pledge to you that I will serve with integrity, commitment, and humility. We are stronger together, and our greatest successes will always be rooted in our shared belief in strength through unity.

Playing the Long Game

If you spend enough time around Washington, you learn pretty quickly that not every important fight ends with a dramatic floor vote or a bill signing ceremony. Most of the real battles happen quietly, behind closed doors, over months or even years.

And right now, our industry is in the middle of a lot of them.

For a long time, beverage alcohol operated in a relatively favorable environment. The conversations were mostly about growth: new products, modernization, premiumization, and evolving consumer tastes. But the mood has shifted. Today, there's pressure coming from every direction: economic, political, cultural, and regulatory.

“Federal advocacy is rarely about instant wins. A lot of the work involves preventing bad ideas from becoming law in the first place.”

In Washington, both parties increasingly view policy through the lens of affordability and consumer frustration. Politicians want to know how an issue affects household budgets, prices, and fairness. Whether we're talking about tariffs, taxes, swipe fees, or competition policy, that's now the language of the debate.

And that framing matters for our industry more than people realize.



JOHN BODNOVICH is the Executive Director of American Beverage Licensees.

Take swipe fees. Most consumers have no idea how much small businesses pay every year every time someone taps a credit card. Retailers know, though. It's one of those constant frustrations quietly eating away at margins.

There's growing bipartisan interest in reform, but also enormous opposition from some very powerful interests. That's exactly why organizations like ABL matter, because independent retailers need someone consistently in the room making the case.

Then, of course, there's hemp-derived THC.

If there's one issue that could reshape the landscape overnight, this is it. ABL's position has been straightforward from the beginning: if these products are going to be sold commercially, they should play by the same rules as beverage alcohol. Age verification. Testing. Enforcement. Taxation. Trade practice rules. Real accountability.

Because if you want to be treated like alcohol, you should be regulated like alcohol.

But maybe the most important thing to understand is this: federal advocacy is rarely about instant wins. A lot of the work involves preventing bad ideas from becoming law in the first place. Sometimes success means slowing something down long enough for businesses to adapt.

That may not sound glamorous, but stability matters.

At the end of the day, that's really what we're fighting for: the independent businesses that hold communities together. The neighborhood taverns, package stores, and bars that employ people, sponsor little league teams, host fundraisers, and serve as gathering places across the country.

Those businesses still matter. A lot.

Hemp at a Crossroads

With a major federal deadline approaching, Congress is weighing competing approaches to intoxicating hemp products as ABL pushes for a regulated marketplace that protects consumers, preserves state authority and recognizes responsible retailers.

For nearly eight years, since the 2018 Farm Bill legalized hemp based largely on the concentration of delta-9 THC in the plant, the hemp marketplace has evolved well beyond traditional industrial hemp into a \$30 billion industry.

Today, hemp-derived THC beverages and other intoxicating cannabinoid products are sold across the country under widely varying state laws and, in many cases, without the regulatory standards long associated with another intoxicating consumer product: beverage alcohol.

Despite the strides made by states to create and implement regulatory frameworks for these products, in November 2025 Congress put its imprimatur on the growing market by passing legislation creating a new federal definition of hemp.

Scheduled to take effect November 12, 2026, the law establishes a total-THC standard and excludes from the definition lawful hemp-derived cannabinoid products

containing more than 0.4 milligrams of total THC and certain other cannabinoids per container. This standard, would remove most currently marketed intoxicating hemp beverages from the federal definition.

ABL and its members have consistently held that intoxicating hemp products intended for adult consumption should exist in a serious regulatory framework built around consumer safety, accountability and effective state oversight.

That means meaningful age restrictions, product testing and labeling standards, enforcement mechanisms, appropriate taxation and trade practice protections. It also means preserving the authority of states to determine how intoxicating products are regulated and sold within their borders.

A POLICY DISCUSSION ENSUES

Over the course of this year, federal legislators, trade associations, and hemp and alcohol industry trade associations have discussed and debated now best to address the November 2026 deadline and create proper federal policy for these products. This has included efforts to shape policy through farm bill and funding packages.

On July 22, Representatives Andy Barr (R-KY) and Angie Craig (D-MN) introduced the bipartisan Lawful Hemp Protection Act (H.R. 9830), offering Congress a comprehensive alternative to simply allowing the new federal definition to eliminate much of the existing intoxicating hemp marketplace.

continued>>>

CONGRESS REDEFINES HEMP

NOV. 12, 2025

Congress enacts a new federal definition of hemp with a one-year implementation period. Most intoxicating hemp products exceeding the new 0.4 mg-per-container standard are scheduled to fall outside the federal definition of hemp on November 12, 2026.

BARR-CRAIG FRAMEWORK

JULY 22, 2026

Reps. Andy Barr (R-KY) and Angie Craig (D-MN) introduce the bipartisan Lawful Hemp Protection Act (H.R. 9830), proposing a comprehensive federal regulatory framework including 21+ sales, testing, labeling and restrictions on synthetic cannabinoids.

ABL TAKES ACTION

AUG. 4-6, 2026

ABL urges congressional leaders to preserve a temporary hemp extension in the Senate continuing resolution and works with beverage, retail and hemp organizations to build support for additional time to develop a durable regulatory framework.

SPECIAL REPORT

The legislation would establish federal standards governing cultivation, manufacturing, testing and labeling of hemp-derived consumer products; prohibit synthetic cannabinoids in finished products; restrict sales to consumers age 21 and older; and establish packaging and marketing protections intended to limit youth access.

Perhaps most importantly, the Barr-Craig legislation represents an important shift in the congressional debate: from whether intoxicating hemp products should simply disappear from the legal marketplace to how Congress might create a lasting regulatory structure for products that remain lawful.

A TEMPORARY EXTENSION

On August 2, the Senate introduced “continuing resolution” legislation to keep the federal government funded and a provision to extend implementation of most provisions of the new federal hemp definition until December 11, 2026. Notably, the prohibition on cannabinoids that cannot be naturally produced would still take effect on November 12.

ABL supported this extension, emphasizing that additional time would allow Congress to continue developing standards for intoxicating hemp products rather than forcing an abrupt federal prohibition to take effect before lawmakers had completed their work.

Despite efforts by some senators to strip the language from the bill, the Senate voted to keep the hemp extension in the bill, and on August 8 the Senate approved the continuing resolution by a bipartisan 90-6 vote.

As of publication, the House must still approve the Senate legislation before it can be sent to the President.

A BEVERAGE-SPECIFIC APPROACH

The congressional debate entered another phase on August 10 when Representatives Beth Van Duyne (R-TX) and Greg Landsman (D-OH) introduced the bipartisan Beverage Regulatory Parity Act, legislation specifically addressing hemp-derived intoxicating beverages.

The bill recognizes that intoxicating beverages present distinct regulatory questions — and that many of those questions have long been addressed in the beverage alcohol marketplace. It would establish a federal regulatory structure for hemp-derived beverages, including a 21-and-older purchase requirement, product testing and labeling requirements, potency standards and an excise tax.

“Hemp products intended for adult consumption should exist in a serious regulatory framework.”

It would also apply a three-tier distribution structure and federal alcohol trade practice principles to the category while preserving an important role for state regulation.

ABL supports the bipartisan Beverage Regulatory Parity Act and sees it as a serious effort to provide regulatory certainty while protecting consumers and recognizing the systems that have successfully governed beverage alcohol for generations.

ABL will continue working with lawmakers and partners to advance a framework that protects consumers, respects state authority and gives responsible businesses clear rules for participating in an emerging marketplace.

SENATE PRESERVES EXTENSION

AUG. 8, 2026

The Senate approves the continuing resolution after rejecting an effort to remove the hemp provision. If enacted, most of the November 12 changes would be postponed until December 11, while the prohibition on synthetic cannabinoids would still take effect November 12.

BEVERAGE REGULATORY PARITY ACT

AUG. 10, 2026

Reps. Beth Van Duyne (R-TX) and Greg Landsman (D-OH) introduce bipartisan legislation creating a dedicated regulatory framework for hemp-derived intoxicating beverages, drawing on elements of the beverage alcohol regulatory system.

THE HOUSE + A PERMANENT SOLUTION

NEXT

The House must act on the Senate CR. Meanwhile, ABL continues advocating for a long-term framework built around consumer safety, responsible retailing and state-based regulation.

Swipe Fees, Penny Policy & More...

From swipe fees to trade issues to penny policy, emerging policy issues beyond traditional alcohol regulation increasingly affect the day-to-day business of independent beverage retailers. Here are six issues ABL is watching as Congress returns for a busy fall.

Credit Card Competition Act Builds Momentum

WHAT HAPPENED

The bipartisan Credit Card Competition Act (H.R. 7035/S. 3623) picked up new Senate support before the August recess, with Sens. Bernie Moreno (R-OH), Cynthia Lummis (R-WY) and Angus King (I-ME) joining as cosponsors. Moreno and Lummis are particularly notable additions as the first members of the Senate Banking Committee — which has jurisdiction over the legislation — to back the bill. President Trump has also renewed his support for the legislation, while Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) recently called for congressional action.

Credit and debit card swipe fees reached a record \$198.25 billion in 2025 and have become one of the largest operating expenses for Main Street merchants. ABL has long supported the CCCA because introducing competition into the credit card routing market could help reduce costs for retailers and, ultimately, consumers.

WHERE IT STANDS

Growing bipartisan support gives CCCA advocates additional momentum heading into the fall, though congressional action is still needed.

Common Cents Act Moves Closer to the Finish Line

WHAT HAPPENED

Congress is moving toward establishing a national framework for cash transactions as the penny is phased out. The House passed the bipartisan Common Cents Act (H.R. 3074) in July, and the Senate followed on August 7, approving an amended version (S. 1525) by unanimous consent. ABL worked alongside other Main Street business organizations in support of the legislation.

Cash remains an important payment option for bars, taverns and package liquor stores. Without federal guidance, businesses could face liability due to different state approaches to rounding transactions as pennies disappear from circulation. A uniform national standard would give retailers and customers clear, consistent rules.

WHERE IT STANDS

Because the Senate amended the legislation, the House must approve the Senate-passed version before the measure can go to the President. ABL is encouraging prompt House action.

Beverage Alcohol Caught in a Changing Trade Landscape

WHAT HAPPENED

Trade policy has remained a moving target for beverage alcohol. The Administration removed tariffs on UK whiskies from a Section 301 action after ABL and its Toasts Not Tariffs coalition partners urged broader relief for imported wine and spirits. At the same time, new trade tensions with Canada have raised the prospect of substantial tariffs on Canadian beverage alcohol in response to provincial restrictions on U.S. products.

continued>>>

Wine and spirits are often tied to geographic origin and cannot simply be sourced somewhere else when tariffs make imports more expensive. Trade disputes can therefore translate directly into higher costs, reduced selection and uncertainty for American distributors, package stores, bars and restaurants.

WHERE IT STANDS

ABL continues working through the Toasts Not Tariffs coalition to promote tariff-free beverage alcohol trade while supporting efforts to restore market access for American products abroad.

Craft Spirits Put Market Access in Spotlight

WHAT HAPPENED

Craft distillers are advancing two different approaches to concerns about getting products to market. The American Craft Spirits Association is seeking congressional support for an FTC study of the distilled spirits distribution system, including competition, consolidation and barriers to market access. Separately, Rep. Greg Steube (R-FL) has introduced H.R. 9767, which would create a federal framework for qualifying independent craft distilleries to ship spirits directly to consumers when permitted by both states.

WHERE IT STANDS

Both proposals could have implications for independent retailers and the three-tier system. ABL is monitoring efforts to address distribution competition while reviewing how a new federal DTC framework would interact with existing state alcohol laws.

Organized Retail Crime Bill Awaits Senate Action

WHAT HAPPENED

The House overwhelmingly approved the bipartisan Combating Organized Retail Crime Act (CORCA) earlier this year, putting pressure on the Senate to take up its companion legislation. The bill would establish a coordinated federal response to organized retail crime, strengthen information sharing

among law enforcement agencies and retailers, and give federal authorities additional tools to investigate sophisticated criminal networks targeting businesses.

WHERE IT STANDS

Package liquor stores and other beverage retailers are not immune from increasingly organized retail theft. ABL supports CORCA as a commonsense step toward improving coordination and giving law enforcement better tools to combat criminal enterprises targeting Main Street businesses. Senate action is the next step.

Highway Bill Keeps Impaired Driving Policy in Play

WHAT HAPPENED

Congress appears headed toward temporarily extending federal surface transportation programs while work continues on a longer-term highway bill. At the same time, NHTSA continues researching technology capable of detecting driver impairment, while lawmakers debate the federal mandate directing the agency to develop impaired-driving prevention technology for future vehicles.

WHERE IT STANDS

Surface transportation legislation has long been the primary vehicle for federal impaired-driving policy, including highway safety grants, DUI enforcement and vehicle technology requirements. ABL will continue monitoring the debate and supporting effective approaches that advance traffic safety while recognizing questions surrounding technology, privacy and implementation.

Taken together, these issues underscore the breadth of federal policy decisions that can affect independent beverage retailers. As Congress returns this fall, ABL will continue working to ensure that the perspective of Main Street beverage retailers is represented.

7th Circuit Briefed; ABL Op/Ed

ABL Takes Shipping Litigation Case to the *Washington Examiner*

In July, the *Washington Examiner* published an ABL op-ed, “Seven Years Later, Serial Retail Alcohol Shipping Litigation Still Costs Taxpayers,” examining the continuing series of lawsuits challenging state laws governing interstate retail alcohol shipping.

The piece argued that, seven years after the Supreme Court’s *Tennessee Wine* decision, federal appellate courts have developed an increasingly consistent body of law recognizing states’ authority to structure and regulate their alcohol markets. Yet similar lawsuits continue to be filed around the country, requiring state attorneys general, alcohol regulators and taxpayers to devote additional resources to defending state laws.

The op-ed makes the case that constitutional challenges deserve appropriate judicial review, but that continued litigation should also account for the substantial appellate precedent that has developed and the authority the Twenty-first Amendment provides states to regulate the importation, distribution and sale of alcohol.

[READ THE ABL OP-ED IN THE WASHINGTON EXAMINER →](#)

Seventh Circuit Accepts ABL Amicus Brief in *Freehan v. Berg*

ABL and the Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America (WSWA) recently filed a joint amicus brief in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit supporting Illinois’ authority to require alcohol retailers shipping to Illinois consumers to maintain a physical presence within the state. The Seventh Circuit granted ABL and WSWA’s motion for leave to participate as amicus curiae, allowing the brief to become part of the appellate record.

The brief focuses on the importance of physical presence requirements, arguing they enable states to inspect licensed businesses, enforce alcohol laws, improve tax collection, conduct compliance operations, and maintain accountability within state regulatory systems.

This brief on physical presence complemented the State of Illinois’ arguments, bringing retailers’ unique perspective to this case. As it has done for more than two decades, ABL will continue participating in litigation with significant implications for beverage alcohol retailers and state alcohol regulatory authority.

Oral arguments for the case are scheduled for September 17 in Chicago.

FTC, Southern Glazer’s Seek More Time to Finalize Settlement

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits are continuing work toward a settlement of the FTC’s Robinson-Patman Act lawsuit but have asked the U.S. District Court for additional time to finalize the agreement.

According to the filing, the parties have been working to finalize the proposed order but need additional time to complete the process, secure the necessary FTC vote and formally resolve the case.

The lawsuit, filed in December 2024, marked the FTC’s first Robinson-Patman Act case in decades and alleged that Southern Glazer’s provided pricing and discounts to large national and regional chains that were not made available on comparable terms to smaller independent retailers.

The case has drawn attention within the beverage alcohol industry because of its potential implications for pricing practices, competition and future enforcement of the Robinson-Patman Act.

The parties announced in June that they had reached a memorandum of understanding to resolve the case and received a 45-day stay of proceedings while they worked to translate that agreement into a proposed order. With that stay set to expire August 6, the FTC and Southern Glazer’s jointly requested an additional 29-day extension, through September 4.

ABL in Action

TPSA Conference a Texas-Sized Success

In July, ABL joined the Texas Package Stores Association (TPSA) in San Antonio for its 79th Annual Convention, bringing together independent retailers from across Texas for education, networking and one of the industry's largest trade shows.

ABL Executive Director John Bodnovich addressed convention attendees with a presentation on "The Intersection of Affordability & Policy in Beverage Alcohol Retail," examining how Washington debates over payment card fees, competition, hemp-THC, taxes and trade are increasingly connected by concerns about affordability and regulatory certainty.

ABL President Nick Fede also attended the convention in support of ABL's Texas members. The meeting marked a leadership transition for TPSA, with Austin Keith of Pinkie's concluding nearly two decades of service as president and Scott Jansen of Goody Goody stepping into the role.

The convention also provided an opportunity to recognize the work of TPSA Executive Director Lance Lively and Christy DeClairmont and to strengthen the longstanding partnership between the state and national associations. Strong affiliates like TPSA remain central to ABL's work - connecting independent retailers at home while helping ensure their voice is heard in Washington.



TPSA Executive Director Lance Lively listens as ABL President Nick Fede, Jr. addresses the TPSA meeting.



Beverage alcohol industry leaders, including ABL's John Bodnovich, at the NABCA Annual Conference.

ABL Joins Industry Conversation at NABCA Annual Conference

ABL Executive Director John Bodnovich represented beverage alcohol retailers at the National Alcohol Beverage Control Association (NABCA) Annual Conference, participating in the panel "Killing Headwinds: Pivotal Challenges Facing the Alcohol Industry."

The session brought together representatives from across the beverage alcohol industry and research community to examine changing consumer behavior, moderation and non-alcoholic beverages, GLP-1 medications, and broader social and cultural trends affecting alcohol consumption.

Bodnovich brought the retailer and hospitality perspective to the discussion, emphasizing that many changes in alcohol consumption cannot be separated from larger shifts in how Americans socialize and gather.

He noted that bars, taverns and restaurants sell more than products - they provide spaces for "atmosphere, ritual, celebration, conversation and belonging."

The panel also explored the growth of non-alcoholic beverages and changing consumer preferences. Bodnovich noted that consumers increasingly make beverage choices based on the occasion rather than a fixed drinking identity, creating new opportunities for retailers and hospitality businesses to serve customers.

Bodnovich summarized, "Products and trends will change. What won't change is people's desire to gather, celebrate, and share experiences together."

ABL Annual Meeting a Success

Beverage licensees connect, learn and celebrate in bourbon country

American Beverage Licensees (ABL) held its 2026 Annual Meeting on April 18-20 in Louisville, Kentucky, bringing together beverage alcohol retailers, industry partners, and thought leaders from across the country for productive discussions, networking, and collaboration focused on the future of the beverage alcohol marketplace.

The meeting kicked off with a Sunday breakfast briefing from Surfside.io's Eric Meth and Tim Sullivan, who walked attendees through how beverage alcohol retailers are driving new customer acquisition and incremental revenue with Surfside.

During Sunday's general session, attendees received industry data insights from Dave Williams of BUMP Williams Consulting; were briefed on the latest in payment policy and trends from Beth Provenzano of the Merchant Advisory Group; learned the latest developments in the ongoing policy discussion surrounding intoxicating-THC products and beverages from Chelsea Crucitti of the Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America; and heard an update on how competition issues in Washington, DC and the courts are shaping the beverage alcohol and consumer products industries from Chris Jones of the Main Street Competition Coalition.

On Monday, leadership from Sazerac Company, including Executive Chairman Mark Brown, CEO Jake Wenz, and Chief Legal Officer Maurice Loeb discussed external and internal pressures that are shaping the beverage alcohol marketplace, the path forward for spirits, and efforts to stop counterfeiting to preserve public safety and product integrity.

“Off-site events included tours of Buffalo Trace Distillery, the Evan Williams Bourbon Experience and Rabbit Hole Distillery”

Amanda Nguyen, President and CEO of the American Distilled Spirits Alliance shared with the audience a message of collaboration between leading distillers and retailers through trade association engagement, and the importance of supporting the system in which they all operate.

In addition to educational programming, attendees participated in a variety of networking opportunities, including the ABL Brand Showcase, which highlighted a diverse range of products from twenty-three suppliers and provided a platform for meaningful engagement between retailers and industry partners.

Off-site events included tours and tastings at some of the most iconic bourbon distilleries and locations in Kentucky including Buffalo Trace Distillery, the Evan Williams Bourbon Experience and Rabbit Hole Distillery.

During the annual luncheon supported by Molson Coors Brewing Company, ABL recognized leaders for their service to ABL and the broader industry.

A highlight of the meeting was the presentation of the ABL Top Shelf Award to Fred Noe III, Master Distiller of Jim Beam Brands, recognizing his enduring impact on the bourbon industry and his role in carrying forward a distinguished family legacy. Fred graced attendees with his unique reflections and humor on his life in the bourbon industry.

Bobby Greenawalt, completing his second term as ABL President, recognized JJ Moran of the Four Winds Liquor and Lounge in Cheyenne, Wyoming; and David Jabour of Twin Liquors in Austin, Texas with the ABL President's Award in recognition of their dedication and their meaningful contributions to ABL.

ABL will be announcing the date and location of the 2027 ABL Annual Meeting, so stay tuned!

FEATURE

New Officers Elected for 2026-2027

On-and off-premise licensees join ABL Executive Committee

During its board of directors meeting at the association's Annual Meeting on April 19, the ABL Board of Directors elected officers to two-year terms.

- **Nick Fede, Jr.** of Kingstown Liquor Mart in North Kingstown, Rhode Island was elected President;
- **Keith Kern** of Jimmy's Saloon in Superior, Wisconsin was elected Vice President – On-Premise;
- **Dirk van Veen** of Mary's Liquors in Tahlequah, Oklahoma was elected Vice President – Off-Premise;
- **Brian Edwards** of Cellar Door Wine & Spirits and Thoroughbred Spirits in Murray, Kentucky was elected as an At-Large member of the ABL Executive Committee.

"I am thrilled and humbled to be elected by my peers as the next President of American Beverage Licensees," said newly elected ABL President Nick Fede, Jr.

"My family has been advocating for independent beverage licensees for over fifty years and I'm eager to bring my passion to this new role on a national stage. I look forward to building upon the work of my predecessors, especially Immediate Past-President Bobby Greenawalt, in protecting the three-tier system and the interests of ABL members nationwide."

The new officers will join those continuing ABL Executive Committee members, including Treasurer **Mat Dinsmore** of Wilbur's Total Beverage in Fort Collins, Colorado; Vice President - Off-Premise **Ryan Maloney** of Julio's Liquors in Westborough, Massachusetts; Vice President - On-Premise **Pete Gwizdala** of Crazy Times in Machesney Park, Illinois; At-Large Representative **Mark O'Callaghan** of Exit 9 Wine & Liquor Warehouse in Clifton Park, New York; and Immediate Past-President **Bobby Greenawalt** of Greenawalt Hospitality in Auburn, Alabama.

As new officers assumed their roles, ABL also recognized those completing their current terms for their service and leadership. These included outgoing two-term President Bobby Greenawalt of Greenawalt Hospitality in Auburn, Alabama; outgoing Vice President – Off-Premise Nick Fede, Jr., outgoing Vice President – On-Premise Keith Kern; and outgoing At-Large member Mark O'Callaghan of Exit 9 Wine & Liquor Warehouse in Clifton Park, New York.

Representing both on- and off-premise businesses from across the country, the Executive Committee ensures that the priorities of independent beverage licensees remain at the center of the ABL's work.



From top to bottom, newly elected ABL officers Nick Fede, Jr., Keith Kern, Dirk van Veen, and Brian Edwards.

FEATURE

Retailers of the Year Honored

Retail beverage leaders from across the country recognized for their dedication

ABL recognized outstanding bar, tavern, and package liquor store owners from across the country as its 2026 Retailers of the Year during the ABL Annual Meeting on April 19, 2026 in Louisville, Kentucky.

Nominated by their state licensed beverage associations, these retailers were selected for their excellence in advocacy, commitment to responsible sales and service, community engagement, and strong support of their state associations. Representing both on-premise and off-premise establishments, these honorees exemplify the strength and diversity of the beverage alcohol retail sector across the United States.

“These retailers represent the very best of our industry,” said ABL Executive Director John Bodnovich. “Whether they are serving customers behind the bar or across the counter, they play a vital role in supporting local economies, mentoring employees, and advocating for policies that allow small businesses to succeed.”

From neighborhood taverns to locally owned package stores, ABL Retailers of the Year are small business owners who create jobs, foster community connections, and help sustain a safe marketplace. ABL congratulates all of the honored businesses and licensees for their outstanding and continued contributions to their communities and the beverage alcohol the industry.

The 2026 ABL Retailers of the Year:

James Waterton & Tricia Waterton | Beverage Depot Spirits | Huntsville, AL

Josh Robinson | Argonaut Wine & Liquor | Denver, CO

Matt Garofalo | The Oconee Cellar | Greensboro, GA

Robert Colombi | CJ's Lounge and Sips in the Park | Rockford, IL

Indiana Liquor Group | Indiana Liquor Group | Carmel, IN

Gary Rissling | Silver Spring Mining Company | Baltimore, MD

Anup Zalavadia | Best Wine & Spirits | Cambridge, MD

Kristie Faufaw | Ryan & Casey Liquors | Greenfield, MA

Tom Heisler III | Pit Stop Tavern | Black Eagle, MT

Emily Stewart & Mary Stewart | Ranch Acres Wine & Spirits | Tulsa, OK

Richard “Rippy” Serra | Rippy's Liquor & Marketplace | Charlestown, RI

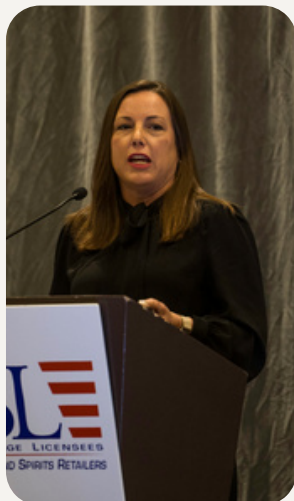
Ashley Haun | Bob's Liquor and Wine | Knoxville, TN

Kim Krayecki | Kim's Barrel Inn | Stevens Point, WI

FEATURE

Scenes from Louisville

Hospitality, education and camaraderie at the ABL Annual Meeting



FEATURE

Thanks to ABL Meeting Partners

Broad support from across the beverage alcohol ecosystem made for a great meeting

EVENT PARTNERS



SHOWCASE PARTNERS



Spotlight on ServSafe® Alcohol

Supporting Responsible Beverage Service Across the Industry

In today's evolving regulatory and operational landscape, responsible alcohol service is more important than ever. For American Beverage Licensees (ABL) members, protecting patrons, staff, and business reputations requires a proactive approach—one that combines compliance knowledge with practical, real-world skills. ServSafe® Alcohol continues to serve as a trusted partner in this effort, equipping our industry with the training and confidence needed to serve safely and responsibly.

Designed specifically for front-line staff and managers, ServSafe Alcohol goes beyond basic awareness to deliver actionable guidance on identifying and preventing alcohol-related risks. From recognizing signs of intoxication to managing difficult situations and checking IDs effectively, the program helps staff make informed decisions in real time when it matters most.



One of the key strengths of ServSafe Alcohol is its flexibility. Training is available in multiple formats, including online courses, in-person instruction, and blended learning options. This allows operators of all sizes, from single-location establishments to multi-unit enterprises, to implement training in a way that fits their teams and schedules. The course content is also regularly updated to reflect current laws, emerging trends, and industry best practices.



TREVOR ESTELLE is the Vice President of ServSafe Alcohol & Regulatory Services.

For ABL members operating in a highly regulated environment, compliance is a critical priority. ServSafe Alcohol aligns with state and local requirements in many jurisdictions, helping businesses meet training mandates while also strengthening internal standards. Beyond compliance, however, the program supports a culture of responsibility.

“For ABL members operating in a highly regulated environment, compliance is a critical priority.”

Equally important is the impact on staff confidence and retention. Employees who feel prepared to handle challenging situations are more likely to perform consistently and professionally. By investing in training, operators demonstrate a commitment not only to safety but to employee development, which is an increasingly important factor in today's competitive labor market.

ServSafe Alcohol also supports broader community goals by helping reduce incidents related to over-service and underage drinking. Well-trained staff play a critical role in prevention, serving as the first line of defense in maintaining safe and welcoming environments.

As the industry continues to navigate changing expectations and increased scrutiny, programs like ServSafe Alcohol provide a clear path forward. By prioritizing education, consistency, and responsible service, ABL members can protect their businesses while strengthening trust with patrons and regulators alike.

For operators looking to enhance their training programs, ServSafe Alcohol remains a proven, practical solution—helping turn everyday service into a standard of excellence. To learn more, visit

<https://ablusa.org/resources/server-training>.

Keep the World Cup Vibe Alive

The World Cup reminded us that shared experiences still matter.

This summer, millions of Americans did something that has become surprisingly less common: they gathered together.

The FIFA World Cup drew record crowds to stadiums across the country. But just as important were the millions who watched somewhere else. Families invited friends over to watch matches. Neighborhood bars opened early for morning kickoffs. Restaurants filled with fans wearing jerseys from every corner of the globe. People who had never met found themselves cheering together for ninety minutes.

For a few weeks, America became just a little more social.

The appeal wasn't simply the soccer. It was the experience of sharing it with other people. In an age when so much of life is spent behind a screen, the World Cup reminded us that some moments are simply better when they're experienced together.

Americans have become increasingly isolated from one another. Membership in civic organizations has declined. Fewer people participate in community groups. More meals are eaten alone, and more entertainment is consumed individually. The U.S. Surgeon General has even identified loneliness as a growing public health concern.

No single event can reverse those trends. But the World Cup offered a useful reminder that people still want opportunities to gather. When given a reason, they show up.

That's good news for communities and for the local businesses that help bring them together.

Independent bars, taverns and restaurants have always served a purpose that extends well beyond food and beverages. They are where birthdays are celebrated, championship games are watched, retirement parties are held and longtime friends catch up after work. They are where newcomers become regulars and neighbors become friends.

These businesses don't create community on their own, but they provide the space where community happens.

Local gathering places also provide something that's becoming increasingly valuable: opportunities for genuine, face-to-face interaction. They are among the few places left where people from different professions, political viewpoints and walks of life regularly occupy the same room, strike up conversations and discover they have more in common than they expected.

“Independent bars, taverns and restaurants have always served a purpose that extends well beyond food and beverages.”

As policymakers, business leaders and public health experts continue searching for ways to address loneliness and strengthen communities, we shouldn't overlook the institutions that already help accomplish those goals every day.

That means supporting vibrant downtowns and neighborhood business districts. It means recognizing the value of locally owned restaurants, taverns and gathering places. It means understanding that hospitality isn't simply another economic sector; it's part of the social infrastructure that helps communities function.

As attention shifts to (American!) football season, holiday gatherings and countless local events in the months ahead, there's an opportunity to keep that momentum going.

America doesn't need another World Cup to bring people together. It already has thousands of locally owned establishments that do exactly that every day and we need to recognize their value.

MEMBERSHIP

Stronger Together

ABL brings together state retail associations and industry partners from across the beverage alcohol marketplace.

24
AFFILIATE
ORGANIZATIONS

12
ASSOCIATE
MEMBERS

STATE AFFILIATES

ABL's state affiliates connect independent beverage retailers across the country with a national voice in Washington.

ALABAMA

Alabama Beverage
Licensees Association

COLORADO

Colorado Independent
Liquor Stores

CONNECTICUT

Connecticut Package
Stores Association

DELAWARE

Delaware Small Beverage
License Council

FLORIDA

Florida Independent
Spirits Association

GEORGIA

Georgia Alcohol
Dealers Association

ILLINOIS

Illinois Licensed
Beverage Association

INDIANA

Indiana Association of
Beverage Retailers

KENTUCKY

Kentucky Association of
Beverage Retailers

MARYLAND

Maryland State Licensed
Beverage Association

MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts Package
Stores Association

MONTANA

Montana Tavern
Association

NEW JERSEY

New Jersey Liquor
Stores Alliance

NEW YORK

Metropolitan Package
Store Association

New York State Liquor
Store Association

Retailers Alliance
of New York

OKLAHOMA

Retail Liquor
Association of Oklahoma

PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania Beer and
Beverage Retailers
Association

RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island Liquor
Operators Collaborative

SOUTH CAROLINA

ABC Stores of
South Carolina

TENNESSEE

Tennessee Wine & Spirits
Retailers Association

TEXAS

Texas Package
Stores Association

WISCONSIN

Tavern League
of Wisconsin

WYOMING

Wyoming State
Liquor Association

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

ABL's Associate Members support the association's work on behalf of America's Beer, Wine and Spirits Retailers.

DIAMOND

Anheuser-Busch • Beer Institute • National Beer Wholesalers Association
Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America

PLATINUM

National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation

GOLD

Breakthru Beverage Group

SILVER

American Distilled Spirits Alliance • McCormick Distilling Co.
National Alcohol Beverage Control Association • Provi

GOLD

City Hive • Sazerac Co, Inc.

EVENTS

On the Calendar

Key meetings, conferences and industry events

2026

AUGUST

- 18-19 **American Distilling Institute Conference**
Miami Beach, FL
- 24-26 **Center for Alcohol Policy – Alcohol Law & Policy Conference**
Minneapolis, MN

SEPTEMBER

- 17-18 **WSWA - Women's Leadership Conference**
Washington, DC
- 20-22 **IL Licensed Beverage Association - Convention**
Springfield, IL
- 21-23 **Montana Tavern Association - Convention**
Anaconda, MT
- 28-29 **WSWA - Annual Membership Forum**
Chicago, IL

OCTOBER & NOVEMBER

- 4-8 **Tavern League of Wisconsin - Convention**
Wisconsin Dells, WI
- 4-8 **Wine & Spirits Guild of America - Meeting**
Willamette Valley, OR
- 11-13 **ABL - Fall Board of Directors Meeting**
Orlando, FL
- 11-14 **NBWA - 89th Annual Convention**
Orlando, FL
- 13 **NY State Liquor Store Association - Trade Show**
Albany, NY
- 15 **NY State Liquor Store Association - Trade Show**
Buffalo, NY
- 19-20 **TN Wine & Spirits Retailers Assoc. - Conference**
Nashville, TN
- 26 **METRO Package Store Association - Dinner**
Howard Beach, NY
- 28 **NJ Liquor Stores Association - Trade Show**
Edison, NJ
- Nov. 2 **Retailers Alliance (NY) - Annual Dinner/Dance**
New York, NY

2027

JANUARY

- 17-19 **Beer Wine & Spirits Summit**
Palm Beach, FL

FEBRUARY

- 1-4 **WSWA - Access LIVE!**
Dallas, TX
- 17-18 **American Craft Spirits Association - Convention**
Chicago, IL

APRIL

- 4-8 **Tavern League of Wisconsin - Convention**
Stevens Point, WI
- 5-7 **Craft Brewers Conference**
San Antonio, TX
- 11-14 **Wine & Spirits Guild of America - Meeting**
Destin, FL
- 11-14 **NBWA Legislative Conference**
Washington, DC



April 17-19
ABL Annual Meeting
Louisville, KY

MAY

- 24-27 **NABCA - 90th Annual Conference**
Orlando, FL



Dates and details are subject to change.
For the latest information, visit
ablusa.org/events

PRESERVE

The right of responsible on- and off-premise beverage alcohol retailers to operate legitimate and lawful businesses without burdensome intrusion.

CONNECT

The people and organizations engaged in the responsible sale of beverage alcohol through communication, innovative services, education and training.

EDUCATE

The public about the scope and importance of the licensed beverage alcohol industry.



5101 River Road, Suite 108
Bethesda, MD 20816
(301) 656-1494
ablusa.org