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Hoosiers Already Have Responsible Alcohol Choices

INDIANAPOLIS - Indiana's alcohol beverage retailers believe Hoosiers already have responsible choices when it comes to alcohol. Members of the Indiana Association of Beverage Retailers (IABR) who own and operate the state's licensed package liquor stores reacted to a coalition of out-of-state big box stores that want to weaken Indiana's alcohol laws.

"There is nothing new about today's announcement," said John Livengood, IABR president and CEO. "This legislative initiative by the big box chain stores and gas stations delivered during the holidays is like re-gifting a four-year-old fruitcake; it's something that's been around for years and nobody wants it. The legislature has looked at and rejected similar initiatives in the past, and it's a path down which no one wants to go. This is the 'same old, same old.'"

The mislabeled Alliance of Responsible Alcohol Retailers (ARAR) is a coalition of out-of-state big box stores, like Walmart, Costco and Kroger; gas stations; and big oil companies. They do not represent a "grassroots coalition" as they claim. In an online petition last year, Hoosiers for Beverage Choices was only able to gain support from 53,000 people, less than 1 percent of Hoosiers. There has been no verification that those who signed their online petition are Indiana residents of legal drinking age.

The end to locally owned businesses

By law, package liquor stores must be Hoosier owned. For package liquor stores, the issue is survival in a marketplace already tilted in favor of the least regulated. Consumers would have fewer choices and in the end higher prices. For Hoosiers the issue is a regulated alcohol market or a deregulated market where alcohol is treated as just another consumer product.

Indiana's beverage retailers cannot match the dollars the national chains are throwing at this slick, fancy campaign but we have public opinion on our side. As small-business owners, many beverage retailers have owned these family businesses for generations. All give back to their communities, many sitting on the boards of local drug-free coalitions and other community organizations.

Alcohol would be less regulated

"Indiana has had a long standing public policy to regulate and limit the manufacture, sale, possession and use of alcohol," said Livengood. "Alcohol should not be as accessible as a gallon of milk, but the national chains would like to weaken the system that keeps alcohol out of the hands of minors and individuals who have an alcohol addiction. We know that Hoosiers want alcohol to be a controlled and regulated product."

Indiana's package liquor stores can only hire workers who are 21 years old or older, and only those legally able to purchase alcohol can enter the store. Mandatory training for clerks is also required for package liquor stores. None of those requirements are true for big-box stores, grocery stores, drug stores or gas stations.

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Hoosiers would get less choice

"The irony is that if the national chains have their way, Hoosiers will get less choice," said Livengood. Customers will have fewer choices both in the number of full-service retail outlets, but also in brands and individual items. Indiana's beverage retailers offer Hoosiers real choice in outstanding, competitively priced local, national and international products.

According to a statistically valid survey of Indiana voters, half of Hoosiers do not drink alcohol. But those Indiana residents as well as all minors will be forced to pass through even larger alcohol displays to do their weekly shopping or buy gasoline if those who favor deregulation have their way. We do not believe this is what Hoosiers want to see happen.

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About the Indiana Association of Beverage Retailers

IABR is a statewide membership group for package liquor store owners licensed and regulated by the state of Indiana. Founded in 1936, the association's mission is to protect, promote and improve the package liquor store industry in Indiana. The association is also a partner with Project RAD (Responsible Alcohol Distribution). For more information visit www.ProjectRAD.org