ICBV Office Update

December 5, 2017

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**\*\*1** **Calendar of Events**

**December 9, 2017**

NFBI meeting 12:00 p.m.

Exchequer Pub, 226 S Wabash

Following the meeting at about 1:30, there will be an opportunity to view the auction items, with bidding beginning about 2:00.

NFBI will hold its annual Christmas Auction Fund Raiser. This auction is a great opportunity for fellowship, and is the Chapter's most important fund raiser. This chapter uses the funds for things such as assisting chapter members to participate in our upcoming Washington Seminar and to attend National or State Convention.

For this auction to be the success it can be, two things are needed:

We need a variety of interesting, useful or fun items on which people

can bid. In years past, baked items, restaurant certificates, Sports

memorabilia, spirits, etc. have been popular. If you have or can prepare

such an item, please bring it to the Chapter Meeting.

Participating and bidding is a tradition many of us look forward to.

Please come prepared to spend money on interesting items donated or

prepared by your friends and colleagues.

This month's meeting will begin at noon at the Exchequer Pub, 226 S

Wabash, at noon. Following the meeting at about 1:30, there will be an

opportunity to view the auction items, with bidding beginning about

2:00. Please be part of this chance to get to know us and to contribute

to the important work we do.

**December 13, 2017 1:00 p.m.**

Illinois Committee of Blind Vendors Committee meeting

Where: BEPB Office 809 Commercial Avenue, Springfield

**December 13, 2017 5:30 p.m.**

Illinois School for the Blind & Mary Bryant Christmas Party

658 East State Street Jacksonville, Illinois 62650
Pizza, DJ, Santa and more

If you are interested in attending, please contact Donnie for additional information.

**December 18, 2017 7:00 p.m. central**

NFBNJ 4th Nationwide Technology Seminar

From the desk of NFBNJ President Joe Ruffalo.

Received from Jane Degenshein, President, NFBNJ Technology Division.

The National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey’s technology division is proud to present our fourth nationwide technology seminar featuring Marty Schultz and his Blindfold Games and more on Monday, December 18 at 8 PM.

Marty Schultz, owner of Blindfold Games, will tell us all about his apps that are made accessible for blind and visually impaired users on their favorite iOS powered devices such as an iPhone, iPad, or an iPod Touch. To learn more about Blindfold Games, please visit www.blindfoldgames.org.

To attend the call, dial 515-604-9570, then use access code 612068 pound. You will hear the code you entered repeated. Press 1 if it is correct. Press 2 to re-enter it. If you press 1, you then announce yourself by stating your name and you will then be entered into the conference call.

In order to obtain the best possible sound for the call, the host will put all callers into mute mode until the Q and A portion of the call. You will be able to hear everything during the call but background noise from your location will not disturb others listening in on the conversation. During the Q and A portion of the call, you can unmute yourself by pressing star 6. Before giving a comment or asking a question, please announce your name and what state you are from, and then wait for the moderator to recognize you before speaking. We can have too many people trying to seek the floor at one time and chaos can occur. The moderators will do their very best to recognize as many callers as possible however, they will determine the order in which speakers proceed. When finished with your comments or questions, press star 6 again to go back into “mute” mode to facilitate better, uncluttered communication for everyone. Star 6 also works when you have your phone on speaker.

Please determine for yourself the time to enter the call if you live in a time zone other than those listed above.

If you have any specific questions for Marty Schultz, kindly email Janie Degenshein at: jdegen16@comcast.net and put tech div seminar in the subject line.

To learn how to listen to previous seminar calls, please visit [www.nfbnj.org/technology-seminars](http://www.nfbnj.org/technology-seminars) .

Looking forward to a powerful and rewarding seminar with you!

Forwarded by:

Brian A. Mackey

Owner, Mackey Enterprises, LLC

Treasurer & Webmaster, National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey

Webmaster, National Federation of the Blind of Delaware & Illinois

Member, National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Blind Users Innovating & Leading Design (BUILD) Team

609-680-8488

Bmackey88@gmail.com

[www.mackeyenterprisesllc.com](http://www.mackeyenterprisesllc.com)

**January 28 through February 1, 2018**

Save the Date

NFB Washington Seminar

Holiday Inn Capitol

550 C Street, SW,

Washington, DC 20024

**July 24-25, 2018**

Save the Date

NAMA DC Fly-In

The Fairmont Hotel

2401 M St NW

Washington, DC 20037

For more information visit:

[www.namaflyin.org](http://www.namaflyin.org)

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**\*\*2** Shared by John Pare

Dear Fellow Federationists: Thank you for all of your calls and emails regarding the **elimination of the increased standard deduction for blind people**.

So, here is where we stand as of today (Wednesday, November 15). The House bill has gone to the House floor and will most likely be voted on and passed tomorrow, November 16. It eliminates the additional standard deduction for the blind. The Senate Committee on Finance is currently debating the Senate version of the bill. The Senate version does not modify the existing additional standard deduction for the blind. The next key step will be when the Senate bill goes to the floor of the Senate for a final vote. It is possible that Senator Boozman will be permitted to offer an amendment to include the Access Technology Affordability Act in the Senate’s version of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. This is what we have been hoping for since January. The number one thing we can do to help this effort is to add cosponsors to the Access Technology Affordability Act in the Senate (S. 732). There are currently three cosponsors on the bill, Senators Cardin and Van Hollen from Maryland and Senator Coons from Delaware. Therefore, please call or email your two senators and urge them to cosponsor S. 732, the Access Technology Affordability Act of 2017. The best way to contact your senators is to call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for the office in question. If you email your senators, please copy me at JPare@nfb.org.

In other news, we are expecting the **Accessible Instructional Materials in Higher Education bill** to be introduced in the Senate in the very near future. Also, I have received some questions regarding hotel reservations for Washington Seminar. The following information is published in the November 2017 issue of the Braille Monitor.

**Washington Seminar** will be held January 28 through February 1, 2018, with the Great Gathering-In taking place on Monday, January 29. You can now reserve a room at the Holiday Inn Capitol (550 C Street, SW, Washington, DC 20024) for Washington Seminar for check-in beginning Friday, January 26, and check-out Friday, February 2. The rate is $192.00 per night; this rate does not include DC sales tax, which is currently 14.8 percent. You may begin booking reservations directly online by clicking on the weblink below: <http://ichotelsgroup.com/redirect?path=rates&brandCode=HI&regionCode=1&localeCode=en&GPC=FB8&hotelCode=WASSM&_PMID=99801505>

You may also make reservations by calling (877) 572-6951 and referencing booking code FB8. Credit card information is needed at time of reservation. Individual cancellation policy requires notification seventy-two hours prior to date of arrival to avoid one night's room plus tax cancellation charge on the credit card provided. If your departure date changes, you must inform the hotel seventy-two hours in advance of departure to avoid a $100 fee; call (877) 572-6951 and reference your confirmation number. Please obtain a cancellation number when cancelling a reservation. The firm deadline date to make a reservation is Tuesday, January 2, 2018. Reservation requests received after the deadline date will be subject to availability and prevailing rate.

Warm regards,

John G. ParÃ© Jr.

Executive Director for Advocacy and Policy

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**\*\*3** From David Myer via IL-Talk - **Affordable Technology Access Act**

It has just come to my attention that Representative **Danny Davis** has cosponsored **HR1734**, the Access Technology Affordability Act. This is great news indeed.

Also from Patti Chang

Here is what I sent to Senator Durbin's office if anyone wants to use it as a template.

Dear Senator Durbin:

I write to ask that you **cosponsor S732** as soon as possible. I am confident

that you can support the **Affordable Technology Access Act** which would

provide a tax credit to blind persons who purchase special technology. This

is important to education and employment. The last notetaker I bought cost

$6,000 a significantly higher price than the general public pays. This is

urgent as we have a hope of getting this amended to the current tax

legislation but need more cosponsors to make that a viable possibility.

Thanks for your past support of the blind of Illinois. Please cosponsor this

bill.

Patti S. Gregory-Chang Esq.

Treasurer

National Federation of the Blind of Illinois

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**\*\*4** From Chris Danielsen, NFB Director of Public Relations

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Senators Warren and Hatch Introduce New Higher Education Legislation

AIM HIGH Act Promotes Equal Access for the Blind and other Students with Disabilities

Washington, DC (November 17, 2017): Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) have introduced the **Accessible Instructional Materials in Higher Education (AIM HIGH) Act, S. 2138**.

The legislation will authorize the creation of voluntary guidelines to help colleges and universities meet the needs of blind students and students with other disabilities that make it difficult or impossible to read print. The National Federation of the Blind and other advocates support the bill.

The guidelines will be created by a commission made up of people with disabilities, developers, manufacturers, and representatives from colleges and universities. The commission will also develop a list of national and international information technology standards as an added resource for these institutions and the companies that serve the higher education market.

Approved Quotes for This Release

“This legislation is critically important to blind Americans and to me personally, as the father of three children, two of whom are blind,” said Mark Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind. “We applaud Senators Hatch and Warren for taking this step to give colleges and universities the information they need to provide the equal education to which the blind and other students with disabilities are entitled.”

"As new technologies enter university classrooms across the country, it's essential that students with disabilities are able to take advantage of these innovations and fully participate in the college experience with their peers," Senator Warren said. "I'm glad to join Senator Hatch to introduce this bipartisan legislation, which will help colleges select accessible materials that allow all students to succeed."

“Since I took office, I have championed an even playing field in education for students with disabilities,” Hatch said. “As technology has evolved, so has the need for students with disabilities to gain access to innovative learning materials. This bill establishes an independent commission that will create high-quality accessibility guidelines to benefit both students with disabilities and institutions of higher education. As a primary author of the Americans with Disabilities Act, I’m happy to work with Senator Warren in moving this bill through the legislative process to remove barriers in the classroom for students with disabilities.”

CONTACT:

Chris Danielsen

Director of Public Relations

National Federation of the Blind

cdanielsen@nfb.org

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**\*\*5** Shared by John Pare

Colleagues: The following blog was just posted to nfb.org:

Much attention has been given to Congress’s planned tax reform efforts and the varied effects those changes will have on Americans. However, one aspect of the **Senate Tax Cuts and Jobs Act** that no one seems to be talking about is the drastic effect it will have on people with disabilities.

Though not explicitly mentioned in the legislation, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act may inadvertently eliminate federal funding for public vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs. As this letter from the National Council on State Agencies for the Blind explains, VR programs provide critical training for people with disabilities to secure and maintain employment. Defunding of this program will not only curtail gainful employment opportunities for people with disabilities, but also negatively impact other programs such as the Social Security trust fund and Medicare.

We must strive to maintain our financial freedom and independence. Please call your two senators and urge them to guarantee that the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act does not trigger mandatory spending cuts that will eliminate or reduce vocational rehabilitation funding. You can reach your senators by calling (202) 224-3121 and asking for the appropriate office.

<https://nfb.org/blog/article/3408>

John Paré

National Federation of the Blind

**And from Chris Danielsen**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Organization Says Senate Tax Bill Disastrous for Education, Employment of Blind Americans

National Federation of the Blind Denounces **Tax Cuts and Jobs Act**

Baltimore, Maryland (November 29, 2017): The National Federation of the Blind officially opposes the United States Senate’s current Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA).

The organization cites a probable dramatic increase in unemployment among blind Americans, which already approaches sixty percent, as the reason for its opposition.

According to projections by the Congressional Budget Office, the losses in tax revenue under the TCJA will be so high, at least initially, that they will trigger the “pay-as-you-go” rules of the Office of Management and Budget. This will eliminate funding for vital programs and services for the blind, such as Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funding. These vital services link blind people to educational and employment opportunities by providing the training and resources that they need.

The 2015 American Community Survey, the most recent data available, reported that, for working age adults reporting significant vision loss, only 42.0% were employed.

“The detrimental impact the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act will have on blind Americans cannot be denied,” said Mark Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind. “This bill slams the door on education and vocational rehabilitation, and ultimately on employment, for some seven million blind Americans. We call upon the United States Senate either to protect these critical programs and services, or to vote no.”

CONTACT:

Chris Danielsen

Director of Public Relations

National Federation of the Blind

cdanielsen@nfb.org

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**\*\*6** Shared by Scott White via NFBnet

Eligible Sprint customers can get a KNFB Reader Enterprise license for free!

Starting November 20, 2017, **Sprint** customers who purchase a new line of service or eligible upgrade through Sprint Accessibility will receive a free license to download the **KNFB Reader Enterprise app** on up to two mobile devices.

If you are a new or upgrading Sprint customer, you may be able to get the power to convert printed documents into speech or Braille instantly and accurately at no extra cost!

All you need to do is:

Visit sprint.com/vision or a Sprint store to purchase a new line of service or eligible upgrade.

Call 855-885-7568 and ask a Sprint Accessibility Care representative for the KNFB Reader Enterprise app.

Sprint will provide you with the information you need to create a username and password that will activate your new KNFB Reader Enterprise license.

Download the KNFB Reader Enterprise app from the Apple App Store, Google Play Store, or Windows 10 Store.

When you launch the app, enter the username and password from step 3 above, and you’re all set!

Please be sure to download the KNFB Reader Enterprise app, not KNFB Reader for $99.99. The KNFB Reader Enterprise app is listed free in the app stores and can be activated with your free KNFB Reader Enterprise License from Sprint. KNFB Reader Enterprise allows users to enjoy the power of KNFB Reader on multiple devices. Make sure that KNFB Reader Enterprise is the app that you download onto your devices to take advantage of this offer. KNFB Reader Enterprise works on Apple, Android, Windows 10 devices, and Windows 10 laptops and PCs.

You'll be able to use KNFB Reader Enterprise provided by Sprint. Just download KNFB Reader Enterprise on both devices and use the same username and password. For example, you can download KNFB Reader Enterprise onto your Sprint phone, and also to your Windows 10 laptop. Or onto both your Android phone and Android tablet.

To learn more about the KNFB Reader Enterprise, visit [www.knfbreader.com](http://www.knfbreader.com) .

Happy reading from the National Federation of the Blind and Sprint Accessibility!

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**\*\*7** From SmartBrief

**Uber Paid Hackers to Delete Stolen Data on 57 Million People**

By Eric Newcomer Updated on November 21, 2017, 9:21 PM CST

Hackers stole the personal data of 57 million customers and drivers from Uber Technologies Inc., a massive breach that the company concealed for more than a year. This week, the ride-hailing firm ousted its chief security officer and one of his deputies for their roles in keeping the hack under wraps, which included a $100,000 payment to the attackers.

Compromised data from the October 2016 attack included names, email addresses and phone numbers of 50 million Uber riders around the world, the company told Bloomberg on Tuesday. The personal information of about 7 million drivers was accessed as well, including some 600,000 U.S. driver’s license numbers. No Social Security numbers, credit card information, trip location details or other data were taken, Uber said.

Full story: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-11-21/uber-concealed-cyberattack-that-exposed-57-million-people-s-data>

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**\*\*8** **This Week on Eyes On Success**

1748 Hunting With Little Or No Vision (Nov. 22, 2017)

This week hosts Nancy and Peter Torpey talk with Dirk Price, an avid hunter who has continued to hunt even after his vision failed, and John Brod, president of the Physically Challenged Bowhunters of America, a nationwide non-profit which provides hunting opportunities for men, women and youth with all kinds of physical challenges in almost every state.

1749 Talking Book Library Services (Nov. 29, 2017)

The National Library Service (NLS) distributes free audio and Braille

reading material to U.S. citizens with print disabilities through a network

of regional libraries. Hosts Nancy and Peter Torpey talk with Debbi MacLeod, Director of the Colorado Talking Book Library, about the day-to-day operation of the library and the services that are available.

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**\*\*9** From **Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

No matter your level of technical expertise, Hadley can help increase your skill level and confidence. Check out these **instructional videos** for using your iPhone, as well as some more fundamental courses for getting online.

iFocus Videos

iPhone X Voiceover Gestures

Considering the new iPhone X? Learn the new vision accessibility features on the newest phone with Hadley.

Video on iPhone X <http://click.icptrack.com/icp/relay.php?r=16457095&msgid=823474&act=3JPY&c=225701&destination=https%3A%2F%2Fhadley.edu%2FPlayVideo.asp%3Fvid%3D140>

Find out what’s new and what has changed with Apple’s latest update, iOS11.

Video on what's New in iOS 11 <http://click.icptrack.com/icp/relay.php?r=16457095&msgid=823474&act=3JPY&c=225701&destination=https%3A%2F%2Fhadley.edu%2FPlayVideo.asp%3Fvid%3D139>

Just learning the basics of how to use your iPhone? No worries!

Hadley’s iFocus series is here for you, too!

This video teaches how to turn on and off VoiceOver on the iPhone.

Video on Turning On & Off VoiceOver

<http://click.icptrack.com/icp/relay.php?r=16457095&msgid=823474&act=3JPY&c=225701&destination=https%3A%2F%2Fhadley.edu%2FPlayVideo.asp%3Fvid%3D105>

Learn how to use the phone's built-in magnification feature with this video.

Video on Using the Magnifier

<http://click.icptrack.com/icp/relay.php?r=16457095&msgid=823474&act=3JPY&c=225701&destination=https%3A%2F%2Fhadley.edu%2FPlayVideo.asp%3Fvid%3D108>

Internet Essentials Course

Would you like to learn basic skills for using the internet? This course teaches Internet concepts and provides tools and strategies for getting online, including appropriate access technology.

Enroll: Internet Essentials Course

<http://click.icptrack.com/icp/relay.php?r=16457095&msgid=823474&act=3JPY&c=225701&destination=https%3A%2F%2Fhadley.edu%2FShowCourseDetail.asp%3Fcourseid%3DINT-102>

Typing and Keyboarding Course

Do you struggle at the computer keyboard? Having a visual impairment should not stand in your way. Hadley's course, Typing and Keyboarding, shares helpful tips and techniques for increasing your accuracy, speed and fun at the keyboard.

Enroll: Typing and Keyboarding Course

<http://click.icptrack.com/icp/relay.php?r=16457095&msgid=823474&act=3JPY&c=225701&destination=https%3A%2F%2Fhadley.edu%2FShowCourseDetail.asp%3Fcourseid%3DKEY-102>

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**\*\*10** From Second Sense

**Free Windows 10 Upgrade Ending**

Microsoft has been working on making its Windows 10 operating system accessible for those who use assistive technology like screen readers and magnifiers. The opportunity to upgrade for free will be ending on December 31, 2017. If you would like to upgrade to Windows 10, David Flament suggests calling the Microsoft Disability Help line at 800-936-5900 to check your system's compatibility and help in getting started with the process.

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**\*\*11** From the AppleVis Editorial Team

**NFB Connect (iOS, Free)**

Put the power and inspiration of the nation's largest organization of blind people in your pocket. The improved and redesigned NFB Connect app is here!

Get up to date on the latest Federation news. Read posts from our blog, the Voice of the Nation's Blind. Listen to the Nation's Blind podcast, the Presidential Release (in English or Spanish), the Braille Monitor, and Future Reflections.

Traveling? You can find the closest chapter meeting wherever you are. And you can see what's happening throughout the Federation by checking out Upcoming Events.

Fully accessible with VoiceOver, NFB Connect keeps you plugged into​ the Federation while you're out living the life you want!

Current Version: 2.0.0 (November 7, 2017)

Changes in Version 2.0.0

Check out the completely redesigned NFB Connect app. The user interface is easier to use and functionality has been enhanced throughout. Improved access to chapter meetings, podcasts, blogs and more.

Read NFB Connect's AppleVis iOS App Directory entry for more information <https://www.applevis.com/apps/ios/reference/nfb-connect>

Visit NFB Connect's App Store page

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/nfb-connect/id968434124?mt=8&at=11l4LS>

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**\*\*12** From Vending Times

**Blind Operators Plan Private Sector Push And Rally To Stop Rest Stop Commercialization** by Emily Jed Posted On: 11/17/2017

NASHVILLE -- The National Association of Blind Merchants drew record crowds of entrepreneurs for four days of learning and networking at its recent Music City BLAST conference. The event, which stands for Blind Leadership and Superior Training, took place in mid-September at the Airport Marriott Hotel here. NABM, a division of the National Federation of the Blind, consists of visually impaired businesspeople who are either self-employed or part of Randolph-Sheppard's vending program. The 1936 law gives preference to blind people in bidding on the provision of refreshment services on government properties.

More than 600 industry members attended the information-packed educational conference and exhibition, and a record-breaking 78 exhibitors filled the tradeshow floor, where operators had the opportunity to explore the latest equipment, products and technology to stay on the cutting edge of vending, micromarkets and coffee service.

Dan Frye, executive director of the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired and president-elect of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB), was among the many officials welcoming BLAST participants. He explained that blindness agencies play two unique roles. The first is to ensure that people who are blind have access to nonvisual instruction and live their lives with independence, grace and poise. The second is to promote independent blind entrepreneurs through the Randolph-Sheppard program.

NABM president Nicky Gacos presented Frye the NABM Gold Star Award, the group's highest honor, for his support of the Randolph-Sheppard program and advocacy work for blind people overall. Frye will become president of the NCSAB in January.

Rest Area Unrest

The most pressing legislative threat to blind vendors at the federal level is the commercialization of highway rest stops through public-private partnerships. A collective effort to oppose the proposal was a major focus of discussion throughout BLAST.

NCSAB policy consultant Catriona Macdonald of Linchpin Industries LLC (Washington, DC) explained that an infrastructure bill expected to be introduced next year would permit states to grant concessions for foodservices at the highway rest stops they maintain on federal interstate highways.

The legislation would amend Title 23 of the United States Code, specifically Section 111, which presently limits food and beverage service at interstate system rest stops to vending machines, and requires states to give priority to machines operated by blind vendors licensed by the state under provisions of the Randolph-Sheppard Act.

The President's proposed budget for fiscal 2018 includes the $1 trillion infrastructure initiative, $200 billion of which would come from federal revenue, with the rest raised through private-public partnerships, which includes rest area commercialization and highway tolling.

"The Trump administration said it would introduce a bill over the summer, but that did not happen," Macdonald said. "But the Secretary of Transportation continues to talk about the proposal, and the White House is still working on the details. We don't know when it's coming, but it's on the way."

Congressional offices are suggesting that commercialization could be good for blind vendors, Macdonald cautioned. He emphasized that blind vending advocates do not consider that to be the case. "The assumption is that blind vendors would manage other stores, but that's not likely how it would play out," NABM's legislative expert cautioned. "The assumption is also that commercialization would bring more business to the rest stops for blind entrepreneurs, but will people buy from the vending machines in front of the building, if they can buy their drinks with their food inside?"

Requests for proposals for rest area business would be for multimillion dollar contracts, Macdonald continued. They would require the winning bidder to pay to build the travel plaza, parking lot and highway ramps, and to maintain the parking lot and grounds.

"The company that wins gets a 20- to 25-year exclusive," she added. "But I don't know a single state licensing agency for the blind that's in a position to compete for and win any of those contracts."

She put BLAST-goers into the big picture that legislation for rest area commercialization was defeated resoundingly in the 1950s because of concern over competition to small businesses off interstate highway exits, but at that time it was proposed as an amendment. What's different and more concerning to blind entrepreneurs this time around is that the Trump administration is asking Congress to include a provision for commercialization in the underlying bill.

"There's a bias against changes to legislation that can work against us instead of for us," she explained. "If Congress kills it, they would have to have an amendment and come up with another source of funds. If we wait until it's introduced we're dead in the water; we have to advocate to keep it out of this bill."

She assured blind vendors that NCSAB, NFB and NABM's government affairs teams are in front of legislators, promoting the interests of the Randolph-Sheppard program and voicing opposition to rest stop commercialization through education and outreach. This has proven critical.

"When we talk to legislators, many never heard of Randolph-Sheppard and do not know that a group of entrepreneurs would be damaged," she said.

To support its efforts on Capitol Hill, NCSAB conducted interviews with 15 blind rest area vendors to give lawmakers first-hand accounts of how crucial the vending business at these locations is to their livelihoods.

"The thing only you vendors can do is put an appealing personal face on this priority and the numbers behind it," Macdonald said. "We need to share your compelling personal stories and the impact on blind entrepreneurs in your state. Write letters to your elected officials; invite them to tour your rest areas."

About Face

Another major legislative concern to blind vendors is the potential loss of priority at Department of Defense locations under the Randolph-Sheppard Act, and NCSAB, NFB and NABM are leading the charge to oppose changes to the existing rules.

In June 2016, the DOD published draft regulations in the Federal Register that would eliminate the priority for blind entrepreneurs to operate these contracts in the future. When DOD published the draft rules, it received more than 4,000 comments, most of which were in opposition to the proposed regulations. But, Macdonald cautioned, DOD insiders are saying it is the department's intent to move forward in promulgating the regulations.

National Automatic Merchandising Association senior vice-president of external affairs Eric Dell praised the relationship NAMA and NABM have been building in recent years, which he said has been strengthened by Gacos being the first blind vendor to serve on NAMA's board of directors. He said the two organizations are working more closely than ever on legislative issues at all levels of government.

Dell observed that there has been an uptick in proposed legislation around health and wellness at the state and local level, including sweetened beverage taxes, since many health and wellness advocacy organizations foresee roadblocks at the federal level with the new administration.

Healthy Relationships

He added that NAMA is working closely with the American Heart Association and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation to ensure that vending operators have the resources they need to provide and encourage healthier options in their machines.

Officials from both advocacy groups addressed the blind entrepreneurs. Katie Bishop Kendrick, state and community advocacy manager for the American Heart Association emphasized that states and communities can be role models by exemplifying healthy vending in their own facilities, many of which are served by blind vendors. She encouraged operators to leverage AHA's resources, including holding sampling and promotional events to highlight the better-for-you choices they are already offering, adding new ones, and posting signage to promote healthier lifestyles.

Elizabeth Vegas, director of business sector strategies for the Alliance for a Healthier Generation and a member of NAMA's Nutrition Advisory Council, informed operators that there's an online calculator at the Alliance website where they can input nutritional data to see whether a product meets the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Smart Snacks in Schools standards for snacks and beverages sold in vending machines, school stores, snack carts and a la carte lines.

Additionally, the Alliance for a Healthier Generation has partnered with Amazon Business to curate an online store where operators can buy Smart Snack-compliant products at wholesale prices. Shipping is free for orders over $49.

"We have 300 items in the store now, and want to have 2,000 by the end of the year," she said. "The goal is to ensure access to every product, once we identify that it meets the guidelines."

BLAST's extensive educational program examined opportunities for blind entrepreneurs beyond vending, into micromarkets and coffee service, and expansion beyond the government facilities they serve under the Randolph-Sheppard program into the private sector.

Food For Thought

Vistar vice-president of sales Sean Mahoney encouraged blind entrepreneur who aren't doing so already to pursue the correctional market by working with the nationwide vending distributor and its new partner, TurnKey Corrections (River Falls, WI. TKC is the parent company of micromarket manufacturer Three Square Markets.

The way the three-way partnership works, Mahoney explained, is that blind operators secure contracts to service the facilities, many of which fall under their Randolph-Sheppard priority, and provide the personnel required to operate onsite. Turnkey supplies the kiosks through which inmates purchase all of the products and services available to them, and Vistar supplies the commissary items. Blind vendors who already have the vending business at a correctional facility have the potential to expand their services by adding a TKC kiosk.

TKC's kiosk streamlines inmate access to commissary supplies, email, phone calls, video visitation, MP3 player music downloads and more. The operator receives all of the revenue generated from the kiosk, minus a percentage that goes to TKC and a commission to the institution.

Vistar and Turnkey provide blind vendors with all of the necessary support, from helping them secure the account to implementing and executing the program.

"We sell direct to municipal jails, county jails and federal prisons, and 50% of our corrections business is through contractors, like you," Mahoney said. He added that Vistar's 2016 acquisition of Jenny Service Co., a distributor to the correctional commissary market, doubled its existing business in the channel and expanded its breadth of products beyond food to include clothing, footwear, stationery and electronics. The acquisition also brought a dedicated, experienced corrections sales team onboard.

TKC president Rob Allen explained that the inmate kiosk system works with a locking wristband that inmates hold to the kiosk, and then enter a PIN to log in. The same wristband can also be used by inmates to pay at vending machines, debiting their accounts.

"We run our kiosks in jails, and there are a lot of good operators like you out there who can get the technology from us and the logistics from Vistar, and it's a win for all three of us," he said. "The operators get in the door, and Turnkey receives a percent of sales, and the operator receives the rest and we help educate you to be your best. Once you secure a meeting, Turnkey Corrections and Vistar will send people to support you in selling the account."

365 Retail Markets' Amber Tucker encouraged blind entrepreneurs to expand beyond vending into micromarkets, and provided a synopsis of the benefits of the self-checkout technology.

"Micromarkets increase sales, improve customer service and employee satisfaction with enhanced variety, and reduce operating costs. And they are open 24/7, 365 days a year," she said. "They can provide more options, including fruit and vegetables, sandwiches -- anything with a barcode. You can sell family-size frozen meals for customers to bring home for dinner."

She emphasized the value today's employers recognize in providing a fresh, healthy mix of food and beverages onsite to encourage employees to stay on campus.

Tucker also informed blind vendors that 365 is adding Braille to its kiosk interface to facilitate checkout for blind consumers. The kiosks already feature voice output each time a customer scans a product and once the total price of their purchase is tallied.

Office Convenience Services

Office coffee service veteran Ken Shea, vice-president of coffee service for Palm Harbor, FL-based food and beverage broker G&J Marketing and Sales Co., emphasized to BLAST showgoers that the time couldn't be better to branch into OCS, if they have not yet done so, and to expand that segment of their businesses if it's a service they already provide.

"OCS today stands for 'office convenience services' rather than office coffee service. The operators with the most success bundle services," Shea said. "Ninety percent of offices give coffee away as an amenity, which is a small price to pay to have a happy office. Water is fun and simple to get into ,and there's high demand for it."

He emphasized that account retention should be the number one focal point for blind vendors, and the more products and services they provide, the less likely their existing clients will be to look elsewhere.

The trend from batch brew to single cup alone presents an opportunity for operators to grow same-account sales by the inherently higher cost per-cup and the addition of SKUs to satisfy demand for crowd-pleasing variety, Shea pointed out.

And today's employers provide many amenities besides coffee, with complementary snacks and cold drinks becoming the norm in the breakroom to keep employees onsite, Shea added. "With the products you have in vending, you're a step ahead of the game over many OCS operators," he said. "You can come into the same account with snack products with 35% to 45% profit, and not necessarily have to even place machines."

The OCS veteran emphasized to newcomers the importance of understanding the different opportunities not only at different types of locations, but also in different parts of locations. The warehouse in one facility may require a bowl brewer, while a bean-to-cup machine would best suit the executive offices, he instanced.

"Make contact with the decision maker and build the ticket. Look at the brewing space as your retail space; add flavored creamers and other extras," he suggested. "Entice people in the office and guests who visit with more choices, and consumption will increase."

Shea also advised operators to pursue providing coffee service in c-stores and other retail accounts and restaurants. "Many established operators find those market segments to be lucrative," he said.

Other industry experts rounded out the educational program with ways blind entrepreneurs can expand their existing businesses and secure new ones.

Plans are already well underway for 2018's BLAST, which is set for Nov. 12-16 at the San Antonio (TX) Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort.

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