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By the time you are reading this, my term as Chairman of the OCSA will have just ended. I've had the good fortune of working with some wonderful folks during my tenure and it's been an experience I'll cherish greatly.

Much has changed over the past three years. I suppose that fact became abundantly clear to me when I had a chance to reflect following our day at Queen's Park on November 3rd. As you might suspect, meetings with MPPs filled the day. In fact, 25 meetings were held that day. Any casual observer easily could have seen how warmly we were greeted by each of the MPPs and their staff.

Most importantly, our issues were already very familiar to government. Our CEO, Dave Bryans, deserves most of the credit for that result. We all know that it's tremendously important to have a chance to communicate your message. But it's a higher order of success entirely to actually be listened to. In my judgement, there was genuine interest in wanting to help move the files we consider important forward.

This simple reality is quite a contrast with how I felt a few years back. While we were not "disliked" by government then, we were more of an "unknown". Our issues weren't top of mind and our image was poorly defined. We didn't really have many relationships back then. We existed, clearly, but we were largely an afterthought.

During question period on November 3rd, we were present in the visitor's gallery and introduced by members from all three political parties. It didn't feel like some "ordinary" formality; MPPs we knew smiled warmly and acknowledged us from their seats in the house. Later, we were greeted in the hallways by members we wouldn't have a chance to meet that day.

We hosted a reception at the end of the day and the room was packed. Standing room only, as they say. I've never attended a Queen's Park reception before, other than the two we've held ourselves. I'm told, however, that with attendance approximating 250 people this year, it is one of the very best attended receptions on the Ontario political calendar.

The much-anticipated CCSA affiliation with NACDA was also completed this year. For the first time, a completely unified industry voice has become possible. Many new suppliers are now joining as associate members of our strengthened and increasingly vibrant National Association. We know it's because they see value.

We're getting calls and letters from our retailer members who want to become more active. We're getting membership applications from retailers who previously haven't been members. This is evidence of important momentum.

With several years of affiliation between the retail portions of our association now behind us, we're starting to migrate best practices.

This fall, for example, I had the pleasure of attending the CCSA-sponsored Industry Lobby Day at Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Sound familiar?

In 2015, the OCSA will take a page from the ACSA's playbook and design a day where MPPs can work a shift in our stores, becoming *directly* familiar with the issues most affecting us.

In short, I'm convinced we're on the right track. That is not, however, meant to suggest that we're done. Far from it, I'm afraid. The recent passage of Bill C-10

(an act that imposes mandatory minimum criminal sentences on repeat contraband tobacco traffickers) received Royal Assent on November 6th and has become law. This was obviously great news.

But we still need to help the Ontario government to understand that there is more *they* can do on the contraband front. Granting similar powers to our police forces (as has already proven effective in Quebec) is but one example.

Credit card rates in Canada are among the highest in the world. Governments in other jurisdictions such as Australia and the EU have imposed rate caps in the range of 0.5%. Finance Minister Oliver has secured a voluntary agreement with

credit card companies and recently announced a five-year "freeze" on rates following their reduction to 1.5%. Clearly there is room to do much more, and the CCSA is hopeful that the Canadian government will consider doing so in the future.

Beer and wine is now firmly on the Ontario government's radar (largely our doing, I'd argue), but the needle hasn't moved very far as yet. While I assure you it's hard to be patient, I've learned over the last few years that the wheels in government do move slowly. My continued confidence in our ultimate success (expanding beverage alcohol sales into the convenience channel) is based on one simple truth:

Reasonable people, in possession of facts and supported by those who can dispel the self-serving and negative political positioning of others, will eventually find the courage to do the right thing.

So we will fight on.

To do that effectively, we are always in need of your support. If you're already a member, or an associate member, be sure to renew. If you're not, join. Get active if you can. Attend our events and network. Write to your MPs and MPPs on the issues that are important to you. Copy us if possible and ask for our support if you could use some help with the messaging. We can be most effective when we act together and stay coordinated.

Finally, I'd be remiss if I didn't make mention of the tremendous evolution during the past few years of the very magazine you're reading right now.

Without doubt, it has become the benchmark for quality in trade publications—irrespective of the industry. I'm so very proud to have been given a voice on these pages.

I should also thank them, and you, for allowing me the privilege to rant about the various injustices (real or imagined!) that I've experienced during these past three years.

There is something quite cathartic about pushing the "send" button on an email containing my article, having given a subject some thought during its creation. I also hope that my missives weren't all rants; that the occasional recommendation, perhaps... even one of some value... may have escaped from the bombast.

I sure hope so.

