



Santiago C. Corrada, President & CEO of Visit Tampa Bay, showed off the new MONOPOLY: Tampa Edition game on March 12 at a gathering of local dignitaries and media members at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay. The Tampa edition includes some of the city's cultural sites, historic landmarks, charitable organizations, and businesses on the game's classic squares.

## ASAE Foundation Launches Scholarship Program for Young Professionals

By Todd McElwee

The Future Leaders Professional Development Scholarship, developed to support the career advancement of young association professionals, has been introduced by the ASAE Research Foundation.

In FY 2024, the scholarship will award three recipients with complimentary registration and \$3,000 each to cover travel and hotel expenses for any in-person ASAE event. The scholarship is supported by an initial donation from ASAE President & CEO Michelle Mason, FASAE, CAE. Other founding donors include Whiteford, Taylor & Preston LLP and Destination Cleveland.

"Cultivating leadership pathways for talented, ambitious and entrepreneurial-thinking association professionals is a strategic priority for ASAE," Mason said. "Association management is a community-oriented profession and I want young professionals in our business to feel like they have support, particularly in the early

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## Associations Respond to Biden's State of the Union Address

By Julia Stumbaugh

Associations reacted to President Joe Biden's mentions of the small business, manufacturing, pharmaceutical, food and housing industries during his 2024 State of the Union address on March 7.

While addressing a joint session of the House and Senate, Biden mentioned "a record 16 million Americans are starting small businesses" as a highlight of his presidency.

National Federation of Independent

Business (NFIB) President Brad Close said small businesses' growth could only continue if the Biden administration halts a planned decrease in small business tax deductions.

Close urged the Biden administration to pass the Main Street Tax Certainty Act, which would stop the 20% tax deduction for small businesses from expiring in 2025.

"During these challenging economic times, small businesses have continued to create new jobs and be the engine of the economy," Close said. "But

to truly fuel the economy, Congress and the administration need to stop a looming tax hike on small employers."

Biden also celebrated "eight hundred thousand new manufacturing jobs in America and counting" under his tenure.

"Where is it written we can't be the manufacturing capital of the world? We are and we will," Biden said.

National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) President and CEO Jay Timmons said Biden "missed the mark tonight in several key areas when he

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## Choice Abandons Wyndham Takeover Bid

By Jordan Bradley

Choice Hotels International announced on March 11 that it has abandoned its takeover bid for Wyndham Hotels and Resorts following almost a year of unsuccessful attempts.

Choice's exchange offer expired on March 8 and Choice decided not to extend the offer, the hotel company said. Choice also withdrew its nomination for director candidates for Wyndham's board.

Choice began pursuing a merger between itself—representing almost 7,500

hotels in 46 countries in territories—and Wyndham—representing approximately 9,200 hotels across 95 countries—in April last year and engaged in several conversations before the pair reached a stalemate. Choice went public with its cash-and-stock offer to Wyndham in October and then appealed to Wyndham stockholders in December.

"Since beginning this process in April 2023, Choice has attempted to engage in good-faith negotiations with Wyndham through numerous different avenues,"

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## Destination DC Hosts Inaugural Sustainability Summit

By Jonathan Trager

Destination DC has held its inaugural Sustainability Summit, an event that highlights the city's dedication to sustainability and its key initiatives.

The collaboration with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the DC Department of Energy, and Environment (DOEE) and the local hospitality community explores avenues to make the tourism and events industry in Washington, D.C., more sustainable.

Elliott L. Ferguson II, President & CEO of Destination

DC, moderated the event held at the sustainable venue Capital Turnaround. The summit represented local and federal stakeholders and customers and featured a keynote address and panel.

"We recognize our need to do more when it comes to sustainability, so the summit is a step in the right direction as we focus on what we can do collectively as destination stewards," said Ferguson. "Destination DC's Sustainability District is an opportunity for collaborative learning, fostering

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# NEWS

## Iconic Piece of Las Vegas History, the Pink Elephant, for Sale

By Jordan Bradley

The Diamond Inn Motel, home of the iconic Pink Elephant, located just north of the equally iconic “Welcome to Las Vegas” sign, is for sale.

Despite significant interest in the 1.36 acre lot, the Diamond Inn Motel did not sell by close of auction on March 14, as none of the bids throughout the bidding period met the seller’s reserve, according to Trey Perman, President and CEO of J.P. King Auction House, the entity handling the property’s sale.

The 48-room Diamond Inn Motel was built in 1940 (at the time the property was called the Desert Isle Motel) and is one of the oldest buildings still standing on the ever-changing Las Vegas Strip, according to the inn’s website. Due to disrepair and several code violations, the Diamond Inn closed in September last year, the *Las Vegas Review Journal* reported.

Details about the inn’s famed pink pachyderm are inconsistent, lending an air of mystery to the statue. According to the inn’s website: “The pink elephant came from Disney

World, probably in the 50’s. He used to trumpet loudly, but the noise caused some accidents. Because of that, the county made the owner take the sound mechanism out.”

Though the property’s current owner, Sam Aldabbagh, could not be reached by *USAE* for comment, Perman said J.P. King had worked with Aldabbagh in the past to sell five other assets. Perman said he believed that Aldabbagh was at a “point in his life where he’s ready to shed some assets and simplify.”

As for the future of the property, Perman said that he expects a new owner would be keen to demolish the existing structure of the Diamond Inn Motel due to its state of disrepair.

“The inn was built in the ‘40s or so,” Perman said. “Construction was obviously a lot different and so it’s pretty, well, functionally obsolete at this point.”

Despite the results, the auction house remains optimistic, Perman said, as it has garnered a significant amount of interest from national and international parties.

The property hasn’t been on the



The Diamond Inn Motel located just north of the iconic “Welcome to Las Vegas” sign and its iconic Pink Elephant statue are currently for sale.

market for sale since the early 1970s, Perman said, noting it had been put up for closed auction in the mid-2010s without success. Going forward following the results of the online auction, the auction house said that the Diamond Inn Motel will be listed for sale at \$25 million.

Perman said he wouldn’t be surprised to see a sports-theme property built on the Diamond Inn Motel’s lot, but the possibilities were endless.

“This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” Perman said, “to own a piece of land [in Las Vegas] and be able to build your dreams there.”

## Strike a Pose: PCMA Foundation Fashion Show Coming to D.C.

By Todd McElwee

The PCMA Foundation is bringing the runway inside the Beltway. On April 10, the organization’s Fashion Show will be staged at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center with industry luminaries strutting their stuff down the catwalk in Palm Beach inspired attire, featuring designs from Lilly Pulitzer and Amanda Perna.

The event is part of Business Events Industry Week (BEIW), April 8–11, with the fundraiser celebrating the Palm Beaches’ theme of “Living in Color.”

PCMA Chair Leonard Hoops, President & CEO, Visit Indy; and ASAE Chair Lynda Bouchard Patterson, FASAE, CAE, President & Owner, AMPED, will join Verdenia Baker, Jerome Bruce, Leah Jones, Leah Lewis, Michelle Malloy, Darren Mendola, Carol McGury, Robin Preston, Rebecca Ramsey, Natasha Ross, John Rubsamen, Stuart Ruff-Lyon, Constance Samuels, Donna Vaught and Alex Zapple on the catwalk.

Amanda Perna is the Creative Director and owner of The House of Perna, which lists a Delray Beach address.

Her website bio states she appeared on two seasons of “Project Runway” and is a best-selling author.

“The House of Perna is the embodiment of the Palm Beach lifestyle. Effortless luxury is our main objective with styles that easily can be styled from day to night and enjoyed at home or on your most far-flung adventure. Maximalist style with minimal waste makes every piece an important addition to your collection.

“The story of the House of Perna begins with a designer in New York City who was longing to spend her days and

nights near the ocean breeze.”

PCMA, Destinations International, ICCA, Events DC, Destination DC, IAEE and the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals (NCBMP) are collaborating on BEIW. In addition to the Fashion Show, the event includes a full slate of education, networking and commerce offerings from its presenters.

Tickets for the Fashion Show are \$99. Find more information about the Fashion Show at [pcma.org/beiw](https://pcma.org/beiw).

## EIC Recognizes Workday Rising with Sustainability Events Standard Certification

By Todd McElwee

The Events Industry Council (EIC) has announced Workday Rising, Workday’s annual customer conference, in partnership with George P. Johnson (GPJ), Freeman, and San Francisco’s Moscone Center, has achieved gold-level certification via Sustainable Event Standards for its 2023 event. Workday Rising was September 26-29.

“Workday Rising is a special moment for our brand – it’s a celebration of our customers and partners, and an opportunity to see our core values in action,” said Emma Chalwin, CMO,

Workday. “Receiving this EIC certification is a true honor, as it supports our efforts to create engaging experiences that are good for people and the planet—and it’s a testament to our partnerships with GPJ, Freeman, and Moscone Center.”

The EIC Sustainable Event Standards are specific standards for environmental and social responsibility within the events industry. Created by the association’s Sustainability and Social Impact Committee in partnership with industry professionals and leading sustainability practitioners, the requirements provide event plan-

ners and suppliers with prescriptive actions for producing and delivering sustainable events.

“We value our partnership with Workday, and its efforts to embrace sustainability as part of Workday Rising” said Leonie Patrick, General Manager, Moscone Center. “This certification is a first for us, and we’re proud to receive it with Workday, as it complements our LEED Platinum O+M certification and our continued focus on supporting the community, the city of San Francisco, and the environment.”

The standard specifies performance

criteria in the areas of organizational management, marketing, communications and engagement, climate action, water management, materials and circularity, supply chain management, diversity, equity and inclusion, accessibility and social impact. Workday Rising met these criteria and received exemplary credit for exceeding criteria relating to energy consumption by using reports from carbon measurement platform TRACE to provide energy consumptions for digital attendees.

EIC CEO Amy Calvert said: “Workday and its partners have demon-

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# HOTS

**HOTS Bobblehead Burglary...** The Pittsburgh Penguins were forced to delay a bobblehead giveaway planned for March 14 after 18,000 bobbleheads were stolen in route to the NHL game in Pittsburgh, the team announced before the game. The bobbleheads, which featured retired NHLer Jaromir Jagr, went missing while the cargo shipment was in California, according to ESPN. "When your real life job reads like an article in *The Onion*," Penguins President of Business Operations Kevin Acklin wrote about the missing

bobbleheads on X. "The legend of [Jagr] continues..." HOTS hopes the Penguins keep an eye on any suspicious listings of 18,000 bobbleheads popping up on eBay over the next few days.

✱ ✱ ✱ ✱ ✱

**HOTS Bellagio's VIP Guest...** Operations of the Fountains of Bellagio in Las Vegas were paused on March 5 due to an unexpected guest, a rare Yellow-bellied Loon, according to the casino-resort's social media pages. According to the National Park Service, a yellow-bellied loon is one of the top 10 "rarest birds that regularly breed" in the continental United States. The bird was, apparently, drawn to the fountains' lake. "We are happy to welcome the most exclusive guests," the Bellagio wrote in a social media post. "The Fountains of Bellagio are paused as we work with state wildlife officials to rescue a yellow-billed loon."



Delta CEO Ed Bastian engaged in a discussion with *Fortune* Editor-in-Chief Alyson Shontell on March 10 during SXSW in Austin.

The loon was removed by a biologist from the Nevada Wildlife Department the next morning and relocated away from the bright lights and temptation

of the Las Vegas Strip. Operations of the fountain's evening show resumed on March 6. HOTS hopes that loon didn't lose too much on the slots.

## ASAE-USAE Travel Scholarship Seeing Record Applications

By Todd McElwee

Three years in, the ASAE-USAE Travel Scholarship is hitting new strides: A record 92 applications have been received as of March 14.

The program awards three scholarships annually to support a diverse pool of ASAE members who are committed to advancing their knowledge, network, and career development in association management. April 1 is the deadline to apply.

In 2021, Ross E. Heller, founder and publisher of *USAE*, donated \$100,000 to the ASAE Research Foundation for the creation of a restricted fund that will provide financial assistance to ASAE members seeking to attend the ASAE Annual Meeting for professional development, networking, and career advancement. The ASAE-USAE Travel Scholarship honors Anne Daly Heller, longtime editor of *USAE*, who died in 2021.

Commenting on the record number of applications, Heller said it was no surprise.

"There is a deep yearning for the kind of valuable experience gained by attending in-person ASAE events." As well, he added: "It is kind of sad there are that many associations whose finances don't permit needful employees to attend ASAE's annual meeting."

Heller said he is urging the ASAE Foundation to increase the annual number of scholars from three to five.

"Hopefully, given the central location of Cleveland to the pool of applicants, they'll be able to make this happen," he said.

Kristopher Nabors, Sr. Manager, Grants and Scholarships, ASAE, told *USAE* the scholarship has "been a pillar to the revitalization of scholarships and grants within the ASAE Research Foundation." He added that to date \$30,000 has been awarded, with an additional \$15,000 to be distributed in May.

"The ASAE Research Foundation has enhanced the reach of the applicant pool with an increase of over four times the number of applications initiated in 2023," Nabors said.

Grants of up to \$5,000 will be awarded to three association professionals who meet the eligibility requirements and wish to attend the ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition. ASAE will provide complimentary registration for awardees to both attend the meeting as well as two additional ASAE in-person educational events.

Travel scholarship applicants must be ASAE members (individual or organization membership). As well, applicants must be employed by an organization not financially able to support their travel to the 2024 ASAE Annual Meeting that will take place from August 10–13 in Cleveland. A commitment to continuous learning, and professional development is also required.

Funding is awarded annually and covers travel costs and other incidental expenses with complimentary registration to select ASAE educational programs.

Find more information about the scholarship at [asaecenter.org](http://asaecenter.org).

## Choice Wyndham

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Choice said.

Despite "significant" support from Wyndham's stockholders, Choice "decided not to accept any shares pursuant to the offer" during its takeover attempt due to Wyndham's board's refusal to engage "in constructive discussion," Choice said.

Wyndham repeatedly and publicly rebuffed Choice's offers, calling the

merger "risk-laden" and "inadequate."

"The Wyndham Board is pleased that Choice has ended its hostile pursuit and proxy contest, following the expiration of its unsolicited exchange offer," said Stephen P. Holmes, Chairman of Wyndham, about Choice's decision to cease its merger pursuit.

Throughout the months-long saga, Wyndham cited concerns about breach of U.S. antitrust laws and the potential negative impact that regulatory timelines would have on Wyndham shareholders.

"Wyndham is focused on moving

ahead with the execution of our strategic plan, building on our success and generating meaningful value," said Geoff Ballotti, President and CEO of Wyndham. "We look forward to doing so without the unnecessary distraction of this situation and disruption to our business. We would like to thank our shareholders and franchisees for their continued support and our team members for their dedication and focus throughout this process."

Holmes also said that the board is confident in Wyndham's current strategy and growth trajectory.

WEEKLY NEWS  
OF ASSOCIATIONS  
CYBS AND  
HOTELS

# USAE

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# NEWS

## Transportation, Food Associations Celebrate Partial Federal Budget Legislation

By Julia Stumbaugh

Associations representing groups in the transportation and agriculture industries, including the Aerospace Industries Association (AIA) and International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA), are celebrating Congress' last-minute passage of minibuss legislation on March 8 to avoid a partial federal government shutdown.

Meanwhile, the National Parks Conservation Association (NCPA) expressed concerns about cuts to the National Park Service (NPS).

The Department of Transportation (DOT), including the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), as well as the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of the Interior (DOI) were funded through September in six combined bills.

The AIA, National Business Aviation Association (NBAA), American Public Transportation Association (APTA) celebrated investments through DOT in aviation and public transportation.

The AIA celebrated a \$1.25 billion increase in the FAA budget, as well funding for National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), despite a cut to NASA's budget. However, the association criticized Congress' inability to decide on a FY 2024 budget by its original September deadline.

The series of continuing resolutions passed since then, which temporarily delayed government shutdowns while deferring final agency funding decisions, "stifled innovation, hurt the federal workforce, and delayed meaningful progress on key initiatives," according to Eric Fanning, President and CEO, AIA.

The NBAA thanked Congress for including several association-backed provisions in the final FAA bill, including development of an FAA data privacy program, increasing funding for air traffic controllers, and earmarking \$935 million for investment in sustainable aviation.

The APTA celebrated the package's inclusion of the Transportation, Hous-

ing and Urban Development (THUD) Appropriations Act, which invested \$20.9 billion in public transit and \$16.3 billion in passenger and freight rail.

"These investments are critical to bringing public transit and passenger rail systems to a state of good repair," said APTA President and CEO Paul P. Skoutelas.

Meanwhile the IFPA, American Heart Association (AHA), International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA) and National WIC Association celebrated investments in food assistance programs.

IFPA and IDFA cheered on a \$1 billion increase in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which the National WIC Association called "a massive win for WIC."

However, AHA criticized lawmakers' decision to limit the USDA's ability to reduce sodium in school meals, which the association described as a rider "backed by some corporate interests that will weaken critical nutrition se-

curity nationwide."

NCPA, meanwhile, expressed concern over a \$150 million reduction in the NPS budget. National parks are already \$22 billion behind on necessary maintenance, according to the association.

"The cuts Congress has proposed will reach every corner of our national parks, which now face even less staff and more delayed repair needs," said Theresa Pierno, President and CEO, NCPA.

In total, the \$459 billion spending package funded about 30% of the federal government, according to the *Washington Post*.

A second round of must-pass funding bills for the majority of the federal budget, which includes the Departments of Defense, State and Homeland Security, must be passed by March 22 to avoid another partial shutdown.

The AIA urged Congress to prioritize funding the Department of Defense before this deadline.

## Associations Meet with White House to Discuss Change Healthcare Cyberattack

By Julia Stumbaugh

Representatives of healthcare industry associations such as the American Medical Association (AMA) and American Hospital Association (AHA) met with federal officials on March 12 about the ongoing impact of the recent

cyberattack on Change Healthcare.

During the roundtable meeting, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Xavier Becerra and other Biden administration officials discussed public-private partnership solutions to ongoing hospital and insurance processing problems since

a February 21 cyberattack on Change Healthcare, a healthcare technology company owned by UnitedHealth Group (UHG). Representatives of UHG were also present at the meeting.

More than 50% of all medical claims made in the United States are processed by Change Healthcare,

according to 2022 antitrust probe by the U.S. Department of Justice.

The ongoing outage is costing healthcare providers more than \$100 million each day, and more than 94% of surveyed hospitals report being financially impacted by the cyberattack,

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## Sustainability

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economic and social opportunities for small businesses and the local community, reinforcing our collective responsibility to build a sustainable and vibrant future for our nation's capital."

Speakers who shared information about steering DC's tourism and events industry towards a more sustainable path include the following: Vicki Arroyo, Associate Administrator for Policy, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (keynote); Amy Hissrich, CAE, Vice President, International Affairs, ASAE; Richard Jackson, Director, DOEE; Shelby Luzzi, Sr. Manager, Sustainability, Destination DC; and Brian Pasco, Sr. Manager for National and Long Distance Advertising, Amtrak.

Keith Anderson, Deputy Mayor for Operations and Infrastructure, presented the DOEE's District Sustainability Awards recognizing the following Destination DC member businesses,

organizations, and individuals for their achievements: Rocklands BBQ; The Catholic University of America; Oyster Oyster; The Festival Center; SiStained8; and D.C. students Ana Mayer, Zoe Fisher, and Maia Riggs.

"The 2024 Sustainability Awards and our partnership with Destination DC highlight the vital, but often overlooked, link between sustainability, tourism and economic growth," said Richard Jackson, Director of DOEE. "This partnership also represents our commitment to ensure the District continues to be the most healthy, green and livable city for residents and visitors. Congratulations to the winners."

Destination DC launched the Sustainability District initiative in 2023, which the organization called a "gateway for working with businesses and destination suppliers throughout the hospitality industry committed to promoting a more sustainable place to live, visit, and meet." Currently, there are 27 members.



Keith Anderson, Deputy Mayor for Operations and Infrastructure in Washington, D.C., presented the District Sustainability Awards at the inaugural Sustainability Summit on March 13. The awards recognize Destination DC member businesses, organizations, and individuals for their achievements. Left to right: Richard Jackson, Director, DOEE; Jim Edmunds, The Festival Center; Bill Mefford, The Festival Center; John Snedden, Rocklands Barbecue; Rob Rubba, Chef of Oyster Oyster; Anna Mayer, D.C. student; Maia Riggs, D.C. student; Alexandra Harry Nappier, The Catholic University; Debra Nauta-Rodriguez, The Catholic University; Najwa Womack, SiStained8; and Elliott L. Ferguson II, President & CEO, Destination DC.

# NEWS

## John S. Mulholland Family Foundation Helps Feed Families in Washington, D.C.

By Jonathan Trager

When former hotel industry professional Brian Mulholland's father died in 2012, he knew he wanted to do something to honor his father's memory.

"I don't believe in the emotions of grieving and mourning because they're the cousins of self-pity," Mulholland told *USAE*. "I wanted to do something to celebrate his life and have his name live on."

The answer came when Mulholland learned that demand for food at pantries in Washington, D.C., far exceeded the supply. In fact, the nation's capital ranks among the top five cities in "food insecurity" in the nation, he said.

In late 2012, Mulholland launched the John S. Mulholland Family Foundation. The organization initially had one pantry that served 11 families in its first month of operation. The effort has since grown dramatically—now including a couple of hundred volunteers—and last month nine of the pantries served 1,000 families.

"It's so rewarding and fulfilling, and we're meeting a tremendous need in the city of Washington," Mulholland said. "We're not the only organization that does it, but we think we do it

better than others. We treat people with dignity and respect and, yes, love."

The Foundation recently held a Lenten food drive that collected more than 100,000 cans of food over a month, and there will be another drive during the summer.

But Mulholland's pantries don't just provide people with a bag of canned goods—they also offer food such as fresh produce, milk and eggs, meat and poultry, and bread. The Foundation has partnerships with grocery stores, food networks, and churches that help keep the pantries stocked.

"I learned in the hotel business that it's all about building relationships," said Mulholland, who previously held positions with companies such as Hilton and Swissotel before working in consulting and interim management.

The Foundation holds a gala in D.C. on the Friday before Thanksgiving that hosts about 350 people. This event raises about 80% of the funds that are needed to keep everything running, Mulholland said.

The pantries serve a wide array of customers ranging from migrants from countries such as Honduras, Nicaragua, and Venezuela to Vietnam veterans. All are welcome and none



Brian Mulholland, Chairman of the John S. Mulholland Family Foundation, greets a family seeking service at one of the Foundation's pantries in Washington, D.C.

are turned away, said Mulholland.

"If someone is going to go through the trouble to come and ask for help, who am I to judge whether they're worthy to receive it?" he asked. "If they show up and want some help, I think it's incumbent upon the community to help them."

That's why the word "Family" in "John S. Mulholland Family Founda-

tion" doesn't just refer to his own family, Mulholland said, but also to those his pantries are able to serve.

"We treat everyone like family," Mulholland said. "This is a great labor of love for us, and it's something that we plan on continuing well into the future."

For more information and to support the Foundation, visit [jsmff.org](http://jsmff.org).

## Destinations International Announces Dates, Location for Summits

By Jonathan Trager

Destinations International (DI) has announced that Spokane, Washington, will host the next Social Inclusion Summit (formerly known as the EDI Summit) and the co-located Business Operations Summit from October 28–30.

"These pivotal events will bring together industry leaders and professionals from across the globe to share insights, strategies, and best practices in fostering inclusivity and enhancing operational excellence within the tourism and destination management

industry," DI stated.

The decision to co-locate the events "underscores Destinations International's commitment to integrating social inclusion within the core operational frameworks of destination organizations," the association added.

"We are thrilled to bring the Social Inclusion and Business Operations Summits to Spokane in 2024. This strategic co-location reflects our holistic approach to building stronger, more inclusive destination organizations. By sharing knowledge and resources, we can collectively elevate our impact

on the communities we serve and lead by example in the global tourism industry," said Don Welsh, President & CEO of DI.

The Social Inclusion Summit focuses on promoting economic growth through social inclusivity, providing a platform for discussing challenges, exploring solutions, and sharing practical insights on authentic engagement across diverse communities.

The Business Operations Summit offers a convergence for professionals in finance, human resources, operations, and technology, focusing on in-

novative approaches to organizational management.

Rose Noble, President & CEO of Visit Spokane, said hosting the events is "a tremendous honor for Spokane."

"These events align perfectly with our city's values of diversity, innovation, and collaboration. We look forward to showcasing our hospitality and providing a dynamic backdrop for meaningful conversation and actionable insights," said Noble.

Registration for both events will open this summer. For more details, visit [destinationsinternational.org](http://destinationsinternational.org).

## SOTU

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laid out his plans going forward," urging Biden to walk back his proposal to allow the government to claim the intellectual property rights of manufacturing innovations developed with federal money.

"If the cost of manufacturing in America is driven up by his agencies' continued regulatory onslaught and a successful push to raise taxes, investment will be driven overseas and Americans will be driven out of work," Timmons said.

Biden also used his speech to describe pharmaceutical manufactur-

ers as the agent behind rising prices for prescription drugs like insulin, a statement opposed by NAM and the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA.)

PhRMA told Biden to blame pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs), the middle parties between drug manufacturers and prescribers, rather than regulating manufacturers.

"Letting government bureaucrats arbitrarily set the price of medicines allows politics to dictate which cures are worth investing in and who should get access to them," said PhRMA President and CEO Stephen J. Ubl.

Biden additionally said his administration was "cracking down on corpo-

rations that engage in price gouging and deceptive pricing, from food to healthcare to housing."

"The snack companies think you won't notice if they change the size of the bag and put a hell of a lot fewer—same size bag—put fewer chips in it," Biden said. "No, I'm not joking. It's called 'shrink-flation.'"

Leslie G. Sarasin, President and CEO of FMI—The Food Industry Association, argued the food industry's rising prices are due to labor costs and credit card swipe fees.

"We welcome and encourage a national discussion about inflation, prices and the many factors that influence the economy, but it must be a

conversation that is informed by data and focused on solutions rather than politics," Sarasin said.

Meanwhile the National Association of Realtors (NAR) and National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) thanked Biden for mentioning high housing prices, which both associations said were caused by housing shortages.

"We commend President Biden's commitment to an all-of-government approach to solve this problem," said 2024 NAR President Kevin Sears. "NAR has proposed and advocated for many of these proposals, which together would make serious headway toward fixing this crisis."



# NEWS

## Hilton Acquires Lifestyle Brand Graduate Hotels

By Jordan Bradley

Hilton announced on March 14 that it has acquired Graduate Hotels, a lifestyle brand of hotels situated on college and university campuses, for \$210 million.

Hilton made the agreement with Nashville-based Adventurous Journeys Capital Partners (also known as AJ Capital), securing global branding rights, and entered into franchise agreements for all existing and signed pipeline, as well as future Graduate Hotels developments, Hilton said.

There are currently more than 35 operating and pipeline Graduate hotels, ownership of which will remain with AJ Capital.

Graduate Hotels was established in 2014 with the opening of the brand's first two hotels: Graduate Athens in Georgia on the University of Georgia campus, and Graduate Tempe in Arizona on Arizona State University's campus.

Ten years later, the Graduate brand boasts more than 30 hotels in the United States and across the pond with the opening of Graduate Hotels at Oxford and Cambridge Universities in the United Kingdom in 2021.

"Adding Graduate Hotels to our portfolio of award-winning

brands accelerates our expansion in the lifestyle space by pairing an existing much-loved brand with the power of Hilton's strong commercial engine to drive growth," said Chris Nassetta, President and CEO at Hilton.

Graduate has built its brand on honoring "local history, charm and nostalgia" and "reflect the unique character" of their respective universities, Hilton said.

Graduate Hotels are expected to open in Austin, and Dallas, Texas; Auburn, Alabama; and Princeton, New Jersey, in coming years.

"Both Hilton and Graduate Hotels are committed to delivering exceptional experiences and making a positive impact on communities. Our shared values and close collaboration will ensure a smooth transition while keeping the Graduate Hotels' unique brand identity intact," said Ben Weprin, Founder of Graduate Hotels and CEO at AJ Capital. "With Hilton's extensive network behind us, guests can anticipate even more exciting opportunities."

In a 2024 Trends Report, Hilton noted that global travelers are seeking stays for concerts, sporting events and unique local experiences, "many of which are happening in secondary markets anchored by universities,"



The Graduate Cambridge hotel in the United Kingdom near Cambridge University joined the Graduate Hotels portfolio in 2021.

Hilton said.

The Graduate Hotels brand will settle into Hilton's lifestyle portfolio, which Hilton is eager to grow. Alongside Graduate, the portfolio includes the Curio Collection by Hilton, Tempo by Hilton and Canopy by Hilton.

"We have long had a high bar for adding brands to our portfolio, whether organically or through acquisition, and Graduate will be another driver of growth for us, presenting a unique

opportunity to serve more guests in more sought-after destinations," Nassetta said. "With thousands of colleges and universities around the world, we believe the addressable market for the Graduate brand is 400-500 hotels globally."

Hilton said it expects stays at Graduate Hotels to be available for booking through Hilton booking channels later this year.

## Scholarship

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stages of their career development. I'm excited to see this Future Leaders scholarship program activated and look forward to watching our deserving scholarship recipients advance in the industry."

Additionally, scholarship recipients will be matched with experienced

association leaders for individual mentoring sessions. The program is limited to professionals 35 years old or younger who work at trade or professional associations, philanthropic organizations or association management companies (AMCs). Applicants must be members of ASAE.

Scholarship recipients will be selected by a Steering & Selection Committee composed of members of ASAE's Young Professionals Advisory Committee (YPAC) and a Scholarship

& Grant Taskforce member.

"The ASAE Research Foundation's new Young Professional scholarship is an exciting new resource for ASAE YPs," said John Losh, Director of Membership & Education, Electronic Transactions Association and Chair of ASAE's YPAC. "This initiative is more than a fund; it's a commitment to nurturing the untapped potential within our ASAE community. Aimed at empowering those without professional development opportunities, this

scholarship will help more YPs access the wealth of ASAE events, network and resources. We are immensely grateful for the dedication of ASAE's leadership to support the next generation of association leadership. Now we call upon the entire ASAE community to contribute, ensuring this fund can extend the benefits to a broader spectrum of YPs."

Find more information at [asae-center.org](https://asae-center.org).

## Healthcare

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according to AMA and AHA.

Associations represented at the meeting included the American Pharmacists Association, American Osteopathic Association, America's Health Insurance Plans, the Children's Hospital Association, National Association of Chain Drug Stores, National Rural Health Association and Pharmaceutical Care Management Association.

The meeting represented the second roundtable between AMA representatives and the HHS since the cyberattack. The parties also met on March 7 "to discuss the impact of the breach on physicians," which HHS

then shared with UHG, according to the agency.

During the meeting, associations detailed the impact of the Change Healthcare outage on healthcare providers and pointed out "gaps in the response from payers, including the need for more immediate payment options, direct communications and relaxed billing and claims processing requirements," according to HHS.

In response, HHS called on healthcare payers to "respond with urgency" by providing solutions to help providers with cash-flow shortages.

The HHS statement follows a March 10 letter from Becerra and Acting Secretary of Labor Julie Su sent to insurance companies. The letter urged these healthcare payers take actions

to mitigate the impact of the Change Healthcare outage on healthcare providers, including making interim payments and accepting paper claims when electronic claims have been limited.

The day after the roundtable meeting, AHA sent a letter to the Senate expressing concern that HHS' encouragement for healthcare payers to find solutions has not been enough to end hospital and physician cashflow problems.

The association noted that federal agencies like HHS have statutory limitations that will prevent the agency from being able "to require private payers to take all the actions that may be needed" and asked Congress to step in with legislation instead.

Richard J. Pollack, President and CEO, AHA, urged Congress to "put forward solutions to assist other payers, including Medicare Advantage, other commercial insurers and other state Medicaid programs."

"Without relief from these payers in the form of waivers of prior authorization and timely filing requirements, not to mention additional advance payment, providers, including hospitals and health systems, will likely see significant denials of care as a result of the shutdown of Change Healthcare," Pollack wrote.

Pollack added that AHA "will continue to work with Congress and policymakers as the impacts from the cyberattack persist."

# NEWS

## U.S. Chamber, Association Coalition Block Joint-Employer Rule with Court Victory

By Julia Stumbaugh

A Texas court ruled in favor of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) and a coalition of industry associations by vacating a federal agency rule that would have redefined which businesses qualify as “joint employers.”

The rule was vacated on March 8, four days before it was set to go into effect, after Judge J. Campbell Barker of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas called the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) change “arbitrary and capricious.”

U.S. Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Suzanne P. Clark called the ruling “a major win for employers and workers who don’t want their business decisions micromanaged by the NLRB,” while AHLA Interim President and CEO Kevin Carey described it as “a huge win for hoteliers, the lodging industry, and franchised businesses.”

The vacated rule would have expanded the definition of joint employers to include businesses that control

employee work conditions including wages, hours or job duties.

After the change, many franchised employees would be newly owed minimum wage and overtime under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Companies classified as joint employers would also be required to participate in collective bargaining with unions, potentially leading to franchisors being held responsible for labor practice violations by franchisees.

The Texas court’s decision instead reinstated a 2020 rule determining joint employer status by which businesses hold “substantial direct and immediate control,” which is not “limited and routine,” over an employees’ work conditions.

Associations that joined the U.S. Chamber as co-plaintiffs included AHLA, International Franchise Association (IFA), National Retail Federation (NRF), National Association of Convenience Stores (NACS) and Restaurant Law Center, the legal arm of the National Restaurant Association.

These associations represent industries in which franchising is common,

such as the restaurant industry. “Nearly one-third” of restaurants operate under franchisors, according to the National Restaurant Association.

The IFA had warned the rule would turn franchisees “into middle managers” between franchisors and unions. The NRF said the rule would hinder retailers’ ability to partner with shipping, warehouse or call center contractors.

The American Hospital Association (AHA) later filed an amicus brief noting that due to hospitals’ control of health and safety conditions, the rule could result in “every outside contract worker being classified as part of a ‘joint employment’ relationship... forcing hospitals and contractors into impractical, unnecessary, and costly bargaining.”

AFL-CIO, the country’s largest federation of unions, had argued the rule would help franchise employees “effectively deprived of their labor rights” but their inability to negotiate with franchisors.

NLRB Chairman Lauren McFerran described the decision “a disappointing setback,” but she said the agency

would continue working to change the joint-employer standard.

“The Agency is reviewing the decision and actively considering next steps in this case,” McFerran said.

Clark said the U.S. Chamber would “continue to fight back against the NLRB and its campaign to promote unionization at all costs,” while Carey said AHLA will “stand ready to fight any attempt by the NLRB to appeal this decision.”

Associations will now await a court’s decision on another employment rule change by the Department of Labor (DOL) redefining who qualifies independent contractors. The DOL rule has been challenged in the Eastern Texas court by a coalition such as the U.S. Chamber, NRF, National Federation of Independent Business and American Trucking Associations.

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## Association Coalition Supports Congressional Move Against Overtime Rule

By Julia Stumbaugh

A coalition of 101 trade associations such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) joined together on March 6 in order to support Congressional legislation blocking the Department of Labor (DOL)’s proposal to expand the number of employees who would qualify for mandatory overtime protections.

The rule, which the DOL currently plans to finalize in April, would require employers to offer workers that make up to \$60,209 per year overtime pay when working more than 40 hours a week. The annual salary threshold for overtime protections currently sits at \$35,568.

The associations are asking Congress to advance the Overtime Pay Flexibility Act (HR 7367, a bill introduced by Rep. Eric Burlison (R-MO) to the House of Representatives on February 15 that proposes blocking DOL from finalizing or implementing

the rule.

Signatories included the American Bankers Association, American Bus Association, American Trucking Associations, FMI— The Food Industry Association, International Franchise Association, National Apartment Association, National Association of Convenience Stores, National Association of Wholesaler-Distributors, National Federation of Independent Business, National Newspaper Association, National Restaurant Association and National Retail Federation.

“If allowed to be finalized, DOL’s Proposed Rule will dramatically and negatively impact businesses, nonprofits, colleges and universities, states, cities, towns, and public school,” the associations wrote. “Moreover, the costs and organizational changes required to comply with the Proposed Rule could immediately destabilize an economy that is still vulnerable following the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The proposed rule would change the classifications of “millions of employ-

ees” from salaried to hourly, leading to losses in accrued employee benefits, the associations argued.

The association added that HR 7367 would allow DOL to retain the ability to propose further changes to overtime rules in the future.

“AHLA urges Congress to pass this critical legislation swiftly and asks DOL to go back to the drawing board and work with employers and employees alike when considering any future increases to the overtime threshold,” said Chirag Shah, AHLA Executive Vice President of Federal and Political Affairs & Counsel.

The associations wrote to Congress under the umbrella of The Partnership to Protect Workplace Opportunity (PPWO), an organization formed in 2014 to lobby for member interests regarding overtime rules regulated by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA.) The organization supports “maximum flexibility in structuring employee hours,” according to PPWO.

The DOL’s proposal was previously

identified a potential problem for association leaders in an August 2023 issue of ASAE’s *Associations Now*.

“The nature of association work, specifically conferences and events where employees work overtime and may receive comp time instead of premium overtime pay, make this a particularly important issue,” *Associations Now* contributor Chad Kolton wrote.

The proposed change has been backed by labor unions such as the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), which argued the new DOL rule would stop employers from being able “to rely on unpaid overtime.”

Even if the DOL’s regulatory change is not shut down by Congress before it goes into effect, the overtime rule could face legal challenges in the future. A federal judge in 2017 ruled DOL had overstepped its authority with a similar overtime salary threshold increase proposed under the administration of former President Barack Obama.

### EIC

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strated an exceptional commitment to the environmentally and socially responsible practices that are needed to support long-term sustainability in

our industry. This is a direct reflection of Workday’s culture and values. It’s especially exciting to see the certification for such a well-known event that touches so many leaders in the finance and HR space. We congratulate them on the accomplishment and hope to see many more events following

their lead.”

The Alliance for Audited Media, a nonprofit auditing organization, performed the independent third-party certification.

“GPJ’s long-standing partnership with Workday has been instrumental in advancing our shared commitment

to sustainable event production,” said Sarah Jackson, GPJ Executive Event Producer. “Together, we’ve made quantifiable impacts on carbon reduction and created foundational policies that are driving meaningful change in the experiential industry.”



# NEWS

## Hotel Associations Outline Legislative Priorities Following State of the Union

By Jordan Bradley

Following President Joe Biden's State of the Union address on March 7, the American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) and the Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA) outlined their respective 2024 legislative priorities.

For AHLA, a top priority will be advocating for the creation of and standard for displaying fees "for all lodging businesses, including hotels, online travel agencies, metasearch sites, and short-term rental platforms." AHLA is supporting—and urging Congress to pass—the bipartisan Hotel Fees Transparency Act and the No Hidden Fees Act, calling them the best ways forward in the fight for fee transparency.

Junk fees and fee transparency are also a top priority for AAHOA, which held its bi-annual National Advocacy Conference in Washington, D.C., on

March 12 and 13.

"I'm also getting rid of junk fees—those hidden fees added at the end of your bills without your knowledge," Biden said, adding that he's saving American families \$20 billion a year by doing so.

"AAHOA is strategically positioned to address these pivotal issues at our Spring Advocacy Conference," said Laura Lee Blake, President and CEO of the association, "...which presents a prime opportunity for us to engage directly with key Members of Congress, advocating for positions that will significantly influence our members, their businesses, employees, and communities."

AHLA also said it will be supporting increases to federal per diem rates in fiscal year 2025 to keep pace with inflation, the group said.

Last year, the association successfully lobbied for an increase in per diem rates for fiscal year 2024,

resulting in a \$9 increase. AHLA said the increase is expected to generate approximately \$300 million for hoteliers this year alone.

"President Biden's address touched on topics such as tax credits, junk fees, and plans for increasing the federal minimum wage," said Bharat Patel, Chairman of AAHOA. "However, AAHOA Members are currently grappling with the tangible impacts of rising inflation, a decline in corporate travel, acute workforce shortages, soaring property insurance rates, and escalating prices for goods and services."

AHLA and AAHOA stand on opposite sides when it comes to the Department of Labor's proposed Overtime Pay Flexibility Act, with AAHOA supporting the act and AHLA opposing. The act would guarantee overtime pay for most salaried workers earning less than \$55,000 per year, according to the DOL, a significant increase from the current threshold of \$35,568.

The AHLA is also working to overturn the National Labor Relations Board's joint-employer regulation, "a business model that has helped restore minority entrepreneurship and job creation across the country," AHLA said.

AHLA said it will focus on advocating for an expansion and streamlining of the H-2B guest worker program, which issues 66,000 visas each year for individuals working at hotels and resorts. AHLA considers the visa cap "inadequate," the association said.

AHLA is also advocating for the passing of the Asylum Seeker Work Authorization Act, which would "help hotels address critical staffing needs" by allowing asylum seekers in the UN to work as soon as 30 days after applying for asylum.

AAHOA, meanwhile, said it will support expanded access to capital by advocating for an increase to the SBA loan limit to \$10 million.

## Funding Passed for Assistant Secretary for Travel and Tourism

By Todd McElwee

U.S. Travel Association is welcoming the passage of six government funding bills that include financial backing for the office of the Assistant Secretary Of Commerce for Travel And Tourism. The association and industry it represents have championed the position's creation for well over a year.

"Funding this critical position is a step in ensuring the long-term global competitiveness of the United States," said Geoff Freeman, President & CEO, U.S. Travel. "While other countries are laser-focused on growing their share of global travel, the U.S. has been stuck in neutral—in part due to a lack of a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to increasing travel."

Freeman added the assistant secretary will play a valuable role in coordinating across the government to help innovate travel facilitation and address the challenges standing in the way of growth. It will play a significant part as U.S. prepares to host significant international events over the next decade, including the World Cup, and compete for a greater share of the global travel market.

"U.S. Travel thanks congressional leaders for funding this key government position," said Freeman. "We also urge the Biden administration to immediately fill the role and prioritize the travel economy to benefit American workers and all regions across the United States."

The post was established in 2022

through the passage of the Visit America Act. It was created to ensure travel issues receive more high-level government focus and is tasked with maximizing travel's economic potential, including helping communities across the country compete for valuable international visitors, conferences and events. This month's FY24 funding bill bundle removes the last barrier to

filling the position.

Freeman said in December 2022 the creation of the position was "a tremendous win for travelers, the travel industry and America's economy."

"The idea to create a presidentially appointed, U.S. Senate-confirmed position to lead federal travel policy has been around for decades," said Freeman. "Thanks to a bipartisan and

bicameral group of congressional leaders, the United States will now join all G20 countries with a senior federal official focused on travel. The Assistant Secretary will play an important role as we partner with government to lower visitor visa wait times, modernize security screening and leverage new technologies to make travel more seamless and secure."



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