



> CAA's cigar-centric mission applies equally to the industry's machine-made sector (left) and handmade sectors (right).

Advocating for a Diverse and Unique Cigar Industry

When it comes to protecting the rights of cigar smokers and makers, all cigars are equal. >BY CRAIG WILLIAMSON

When someone asks how the cigar industry is doing these days, I give the same answer I gave when I was hired as president four years ago.

In fact, I give them the same answer that my predecessors have given for the past nearly eight decades of the Cigar Association of America's history.

The cigar industry is in challenging times. Every day we are in meetings and on conference calls, on airplanes and highways working with our teams in state capitals across the country, fighting constant efforts to restrict industry and consumers from a basic right that we believe should be protected—I'm talking about the simple, basic right as an adult to enjoy smoking a cigar.

But since 1937, that's been our job in this diverse and unique industry.

There is no industry like ours, where tradition and innovation sit side by side, where generations from seniors to boomers to the newest adults in Generation X find a way to relax together, and where there is a brand and a style and price point for every adult consumer. The cigar industry is proof positive that one size does not fit all.

That's why CAA stands by all manufacturers equally. We pride ourselves on being the oldest trade association that represents manufacturers of every category of cigar, benefiting the entire cigar industry.

Our philosophy is, "a cigar is a cigar is a cigar." We believe the industry is stronger when it sticks together. We were very proud in July to be the 2014 recipients of the Cigar Journal Ambassador Award, a recognition of our team in all 50 states and Washington, D.C., that fights to protect all cigars and all adult consumers.

Over the past 100 years, the industry has had its fair share of ups and downs. Most of us recall a time in the 1990s when the entire industry was in a slump. Actually, "slump" is too soft a word—the industry was nearly dead. Truth be told, the 1990s were the worst years for cigars since the Great Depression.

Since then, CAA helped revive the industry by doing what we do best—working to protect all consumers, manufacturers, and distributors. The cigar industry has continued to grow stronger with each passing year, and is currently experiencing its biggest boom in history.

Still, every day there's a new challenge. The current FDA rulemaking process for new federal regulation of cigars is the most prominent. But in just this calendar year alone, when you count up the reports and alerts we've sent to our members, more than 90 regulations on cigars have been proposed at the state and local level.

It doesn't matter what type, style, or brand they are after, CAA takes on the regulators and the "antis" in every possible venue.

For example, in June, CAA helped defeat a proposal in Pennsylvania that would have implemented a statewide OTP tax to provide funding for Pennsylvania schools. And in New Jersey, which is always a hot bed of anti-tobacco and anti-cigar legislation, bills were introduced that would have increased cigar taxes, banned flavored cigars, taxed little cigars, increased the age to purchase tobacco, and restricted smoking in public places. The CAA, working with its partners in the cigar industry, successfully defeated all tax proposals.

And in a huge win for the CAA and the entire cigar industry, all six bills up for vote in Maryland's legislative session were defeated. The proposed bills would have increased the tobacco purchasing age from 18 to 21; boosted the tax rate on OTP by 217 percent, while also taxing little cigars as cigarettes; and prohibited the sale of flavored and single cigars.

These wins (and others) for the CAA represent key victories for the entire industry in the fight against additional tobacco taxes and regulations.

"I consider the Cigar Association of America to be an essential voice for our industry," said Dan Carr, CAA chairman. "We have the experience and expertise to navigate the complex issues surrounding the category. With a proven record of success in ensuring that the industry is represented on federal, state, and regulatory issues, no other organization acts on behalf of every member and their customers to protect the future of the category."

We've always faced challenges. But CAA has faced the challenges directly, never stopping to make distinctions between the costs of cigars, or whether they were rolled by hand or machine or any other consideration.

For those who want to divide and conquer, we will fight you. We've already shown that when we work together, we can win. **S**

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