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U.S. beer, spirits, wine industry escape big tax hike in year-end budget deal



Inside C2

# Southern DAILY

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## Trump accuses Democrats of 'attempted coup' on eve of impeachment vote



President Donald Trump speaks to reporters while participating in a "roundtable on small business and red tape reduction accomplishments" in the Roosevelt Room at the White House in Washington, U.S. December 6, 2019. REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - On the eve of his expected impeachment in the U.S. House of Representatives, President Donald Trump accused Democrats of pursuing an "illegal, partisan attempted coup" and declaring "open war" on American democracy as they seek to remove him from office for pressing Ukraine to investigate political rival Joe Biden. Trump's remarks came in a signed letter addressed to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, released as House lawmakers met to set the rules for debate ahead of Wednesday's planned vote on two articles of impeachment - formal charges - against the Republican president.

At the same time, the Senate's top Republican, Mitch McConnell, signaled he will not allow the expected upcoming Senate trial on impeachment charges to involve more fact-finding about Trump's conduct.

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The rambling, six-page letter from Trump to Pelosi on White House letterhead largely restated the president's objections to the impeachment probe, but did so in accusatory and sometimes spiteful language that attacked Pelosi, congressional Democrats, Trump's political rival Joe Biden and institutions such as the FBI.

Pelosi, Trump wrote, "is turning the House of Representatives from a revered legislative body into a Star Chamber of partisan persecution" while "scarcely concealing your hatred of me."

The impeachment probe, the president said, is an "an illegal, partisan attempted coup that will, based on recent sentiment, badly fail at the voting booth," alluding to the November 2020 U.S. presidential election in which he is seeking another four years in office.

To that end, the letter's tone was more reminiscent of one of Trump's famously raucous campaign rallies and was likely intended to rally his loyal political base behind him as Democrats move to vote on Wednesday. The U.S. Constitution gives the House the power to impeach a president for "high crimes and misdemeanors," part of the document's checks and balances among the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the federal government.

The Democratic-led House is expected to pass two articles of impeachment charging Trump with abuse of power and obstruction of Congress for his dealings with Ukraine.

"By proceeding with your invalid impeachment, you are violating your oaths of office, you are breaking your allegiance to the Constitution, and you are declaring open war on American Democracy," Trump wrote.

"You view democracy as your enemy!" he wrote.

U.S. President Donald Trump speaks during a meeting with Guatemala's President Jimmy Morales in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, U.S., December 17, 2019. REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque  
House Democrats accuse Trump of abusing his power by asking Ukraine to investigate Biden, a former U.S. vice president and a leading Democratic contender to oppose him in the 2020 election. Trump is also accused of obstructing the congressional investigation into the matter.

"Look, this has been a total sham from the beginning," Trump told reporters at the White House shortly after his letter was released.

Meanwhile, members of the House Rules Committee met on Tuesday over the rules for the debate before the vote set for Wednesday by the full House, which is expected to result in Trump becoming the third U.S. president to be impeached.

No president has ever been removed from office via the impeachment process set out in the Constitution.

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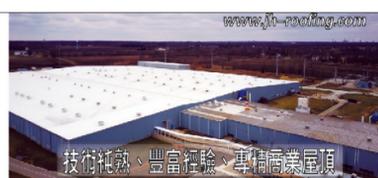


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U.S. beer, spirits, wine industry escape big tax hike in year-end budget deal

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. Congress is moving to extend by another year tax breaks for beer, wine and distilled spirits worth hundreds of millions of dollars that were initially approved as part of tax reform in 2017.

Without the extension, the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States said it would have faced \$275 million in higher taxes, while a beer industry group said it faced \$130 million in higher taxes. One wine group said the bill will allow California wineries alone to avoid more than \$150 million in higher taxes.

Bills to make the tax reductions permanent have overwhelming support in Congress. The House approved the spending bill on Tuesday that includes the tax provisions, while the Senate is expected to follow suit.

Chris Swonger, who heads the Distilled Spirits Council, said in a statement the measure would provide "significant relief for craft distillers across the country who were facing a 400 percent tax increase beginning Jan. 1."

Jim McGreevy, president and CEO of the Beer Institute, said the beer industry supports 2.1 million U.S. jobs. He said the bill will provide brewers and beer importers "the certainty they need to continue growing their businesses, provide good-paying jobs across the country, and continue to serve Americans greater varieties of our nation's most popular alcohol beverage."

Brookings said in a report last year that the tax breaks were worth \$12 million annually to both Anheuser-Busch InBev (ABIBR) and Molson-Coors Brewing Co (TAPN). The companies did not immediately comment.

Robert P. Koch, president and CEO of Wine Institute, said the measure will ensure nearly 4,000 wineries across California can continue to grow. "California wineries were able to re-invest over \$150 million in tax savings in 2018 and 2019," Koch said.

The legislation reduces excise tax payments for all U.S. wineries by expanding the value of the exist-



FILE PHOTO: A glass of cognac is pictured on a bar in the Manhattan borough of New York City, November 13, 2015. REUTERS/Mike Segar

producer credit and doing away with the phase-out that has prohibited many wineries from receiving any benefit. Excise tax payments for small- to medium-sized wineries are reduced by 55% or more.

Boeing's 737 production halt could dent U.S. first-quarter GDP

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Boeing Co's (BA.N) decision to stop production of its best-selling 737 MAX aircraft involved in two fatal crashes will impact U.S. economic growth and employment, but the pain may be brief and concentrated in areas where suppliers are located, analysts and executives say.

The biggest assembly-line halt in more than two decades at Boeing could cut first quarter 2020 gross domestic product growth by at least half a percentage point, economists estimated on Tuesday. The hit to GDP growth would come from a smaller inventory build.

Boeing holds unique sway in the U.S. economy

as the largest U.S. goods exporter and also as the largest weight in the Dow Jones Industrial Average .DJI, the blue chip stock index tracked worldwide as a bellwether of wealth creation.

The suspension of production comes as the manufacturing sector is starting to regain its footing after being pressured by a 17-month trade war between the United States and China, which has eroded business sentiment and helped to undercut capital expenditure.

Since a global grounding of the Boeing 737 MAX in March that froze deliveries, the aircraft manufacturer continued production of the

Advertisement for Houston Travel Shopping Guide featuring various travel services, CityPASS, and local attractions.

Large advertisement for the 2019 Houston Travel Shopping Guide with Chinese text: '已經 2019 休斯頓 發行 旅遊購物指南'.

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\*Medicare 101 sessions are insurance sales presentations.

# Editor's Choice



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan arrives for the Global Refugee Forum at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, December 17, 2019, REUTERS/Denis Balibouse TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



Singaporean artist Qixuan Lim sculpts a model of a fetus head using clay and cosmetic paint in Singapore



Activists attack police officers during a protest of agricultural workers against land reform in Kiev



Cast member Ridley poses at the premiere for the film "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker" in Los Angeles



Casket of Jersey City Police Detective Joseph Seals carried from St. Aedan's Church during funeral service in Jersey City



A Boeing 737 Max aircraft sits on the tarmac at Boeing's 737 Max production facility in Renton, Washington, U.S. December 16, 2019. REUTERS/Lindsey Wasson TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



Ukrainian-American businessman Lev Parnas, an associate of President Donald Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, arrives for a bail hearing at the Manhattan Federal Court in New York



Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-MD) and House Judiciary Committee ranking member Rep. Doug Collins (R-GA) react to a joke by House Rules Committee chairman Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA) during a House Rules Committee hearing on the impeachment against U.S. President Donald Trump,

**Houston Store Will Be Located In The Galleria Mall**  
**Life After Liquidation: Toys R Us Stores Will Be Back This Holiday Season, But Now With A Tech Partner**



The first two Toys R Us locations are slated to open before the holidays. One will be at Simon Property Group's Galleria mall in Houston. The other will be at Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield's Garden State Plaza mall in Paramus, New Jersey.

**Overview**

Toys R Us is opening two permanent stores in November — at Simon Property Group's Galleria mall in Houston and at Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield's Garden State Plaza mall in Paramus, New Jersey.

The stores are product of a joint venture between software retailer b8ta and Tru Kids, the company that is helping to manage the brand names left in the wake of Toys R Us' liquidation last year.

The partnership with b8ta gives Tru Kids a negotiating tool as it tries to woo back brands that felt burned by the Toys R Us bankruptcy to sell in its stores.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

This holiday season, some shoppers will once again be able to shop in a Toys R Us store.

The retailer will open two permanent stores in November — at Simon Property Group's Galleria mall in Houston and at Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield's Garden State Plaza mall in Paramus, New Jersey.

The stores are product of a joint venture between software retailer b8ta and Tru Kids, the company that is helping to manage the brand names left in the wake of Toys R Us' liquidation last year.

After the company shuttered its 800 U.S. stores, lenders including Solus Alternative Asset Management and the Angelo

Gordon investment firm took control of the company's Toys R Us, Babies R Us and Geoffrey brand names.

The revived Toys R Us brand is hoping to avoid past wrongs. Critics have pointed to several factors that led to Toys R Us' downfall: crippling debt load, competition from Amazon, overconfidence, failure to invest in stores and the rise of big-box retailers like Walmart that slashed toy prices to help lure shoppers. Toys R Us, like many retailers, struggled to revamp its enormous business as quickly as the retail landscape was changing around it.



"I don't think there's many times where you can take such a great storied brand as Toys R Us and get a chance to repaint the canvas," said Richard Barry, president of Tru Kids and the former chief merchandising officer of Toys R Us.

The company hopes to open 10 stores around the U.S. in 2020, possibly including a larger flagship in New York or California. The new stores will be smaller, spanning 6,500 to 10,000 square feet, compared with the 40,000 they used to take up.

"While we have a smaller footprint, we believe we will present a super exciting set of experiences in the store and products," said Barry.

B8ta, which has more than a dozen of its own stores in malls around the country, including the new Hudson Yards in New York, will help take care of those experiences. Its in-house technology platform, which is also powering pop-up marketplaces within some Macy's stores, will work with the toy brands to help them create their own mini shops within the spaces. B8ta also says it will contribute its retail as a service platform to help

those brands simultaneously grow online sales.

Toys R Us infamously relaunched its website during its crucial — and ultimately failed — 2017 holiday season in bankruptcy that subsequently forced its liquidation.



**A B8ta retail outlet.**

B8ta will also be giving Tru Kids access to data and analytics to track things like foot traffic in and out of the stores to allow the company to make smarter decisions, according to Phillip Raub, b8ta co-founder and president. "This year is going to be an opportunity for us to test and learn."

The partnership with b8ta gives Tru Kids a negotiating tool as it tries to woo back brands to sell in its stores. Part of what made Toys R Us unique was its access to the best and sometimes exclusive products. But the relationship between toy brands and the retailer was frayed in its liquidation, which led to companies big and small losing money in the process. Barry said talks with toy and entertainment companies have been "very positive."

He added the brands are giving the company "credit for innovation," and they like getting a chance to control their own brand experience in the stores.

The new Toys R Us will be announcing the brands that are going to be sold in its stores in "short order," Barry said.

While toys will be available for purchase, all sales will go directly to manufacturers, without Tru Kids acting as a middleman. Instead, the company will make money from manufacturers paying a fee to sell goods in Toys R Us loca-

tions.



**"We're Back..."**

"We don't make any money off of the sale of the goods," Phillip Raub told Business Insider.

Raub is the cofounder and president of b8ta, an experiential retailer that entered into a joint venture with Tru Kids to open the Toys R Us stores. The new Toys R Us stores will follow b8ta's business model, marketing themselves as an appealing spot for manufacturers by offering tech, data, and insights, as well as high-traffic locations in malls and other busy urban centers.

"What b8ta is bringing to the table is going to be our b8ta business model, really thinking kind of more subscription based, placement within the stores, being able to provide rich data analytics for makers," Raub said.

Customers will be able to see and interact with every toy for sale in the store, which will be from both big-name brands and smaller companies. Kiosks available in stores will allow customers to order from a wider assortment of products online.

Tru Kids and b8ta plan to open 10 more Toys R Us locations in 2020 with a slightly larger format of around 10,000 square feet. Richard Barry, the CEO of Tru Kids Brands and Toys R Us' former chief marketing officer, said the company was anticipating it could take "some education" for customers to get used to the new format.

"But we believe that the new elements of the store that we've added are so overwhelmingly positive that customers are going to love it," Barry added. (Courtesy

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**Robocallers Face Fight On Many Fronts**

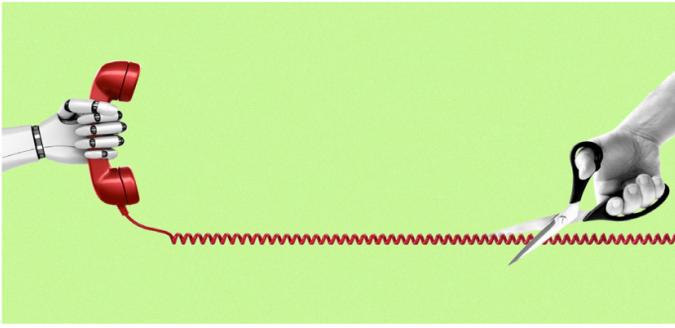


Illustration: Aida Amer/Axios

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Federal regulators, lawmakers, and private companies haven't found any one tool that on its own can stem the flood of robocalls, so they are trying several approaches at once.

**The big picture:** There were a record 5.7 billion robocalls in October, according to YouMail, and the Federal Communications Commission has singled out the issue as its top consumer complaint.

**What's happening now:** The FCC is pushing both policy proposals and huge fines to deter robocalls.

•On the policy front, the FCC has made it clear to service providers that they can offer robocall blocking services by default. It has also demanded that they implement a caller ID authentication framework known as SHAKEN/STIR, which involves creating a digital fingerprint to verify caller ID information.

•On the enforcement front, the agency on Thursday proposed a nearly \$10 million fine against a man accused of spoofing a rival telemarketing company's number to make thousands of robocalls with false allegations against a political candidate in California last year.

**Yes, but:** As Democratic Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel points out, the FCC hasn't collected on the majority of the robocall fines it has assessed. (The agency relies on the Justice Department to do

the collecting.)



•"Everyone should save the accolades for when we crush these calls and collect," Rosenworcel said in a statement Thursday. "And on that score, we have work to do."

**On Capitol Hill,** the House voted last week to approve legislation that would combat robocalls by requiring carriers to implement a caller authentication system and to give consumers free access to call blocking software.

•The Pallone-Thune TRACED Act would also give the FCC greater enforcement powers and encourage cooperation with the Justice Department in cracking down on robocalls.

•The bipartisan legislation is now await-

ing a vote in the Senate, which is expected to come soon.

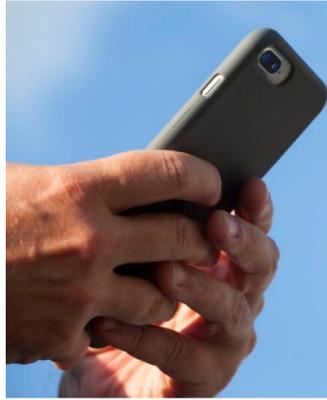
**Tech companies** and phone carriers are also trying to address the situation, including moves by Apple and Google as well as innovative efforts from startups.

•Apple added a feature in iOS 13 that lets customers automatically block unknown callers, a move that protects against some spammers, but not those who are pretending to be someone you know.

•Google has a call screening feature for its Android-based Pixel phones that can intercept unwanted calls.

•There are also third party apps, like Nomorobo and Robokiller, that help block spam callers.

**The bottom line:** Someday maybe this will all change, but for now, your fingers remain the final line of defense. If you don't recognize the number, don't pick up. (Courtesy axios.com)



**Related**

**Bill to limit robocalls passes House by near-unanimous vote**

**Photo/NurPhoto via Getty Images**  
A bill to crack down on robocalls passed in the House by a 417-3 vote on Wednesday, in a rare display of bipartisanship amid a divided Congress.

**The big picture:** The Pallone-Thune TRACED Act would combat robocalls by requiring phone providers to verify the source of calls and allowing users to block those sources for no additional cost. It would also strengthen the Federal Communications Commission's ability

to order the Justice Department to organize a working group to ensure robocall violations are prosecuted, Politico notes.

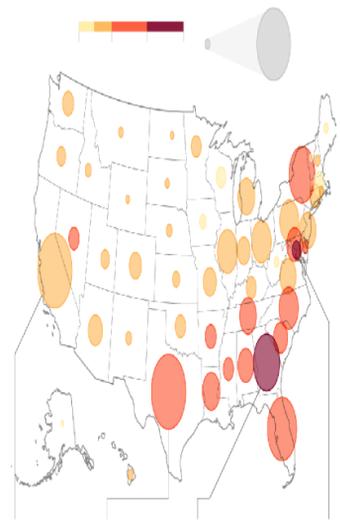
•The measure tackles so-called one-ring scams, wherein companies call an individual, but hang up after one ring in the hopes that consumers will be implored to call back.

•Those callbacks often dump international calling fees on unsuspecting users.

**Where it stands:** Americans received more than 5 billion robocalls in November, and a record of 5.7 billion in October, according to YouMail.

**What to watch:** The bill will now head to the Senate, with hopes to deliver the proposal to President Trump by Christmas.

Where all the robocalls are coming from



**California 5.3 Billion Total Robocalls**  
**Texas 5.32 Billion Total**  
**Georgia Washington D.C. 301 Robocalls**  
**456 Robocalls Per Resident. Per Resident.**  
**Data: Robocall Index, American Community Survey; Map: Harry Stevens/Axios**

The Federal Communications Commission voted on a ruling Thursday that would combat robocalls that spoof legitimate, in-service numbers and provide a legal framework for phone carriers to

carry out the action.

**Why it matters:** It's one of the most complained-about issues in America. The FCC gets roughly 200,000 complaints each year about robocalls. Nearly 48 billion robocalls were made in 2018, according to YouMail Robocall Index.

**Driving the news:** While the problem impacts almost every cell phone user in America, data from Robocall Index shows that area codes from certain parts of the country are much more likely to be used for robocalls.

**How it works:** Robocalls from certain areas in the U.S. don't necessarily reflect where the call is coming from. Often scammers use a very popular technique called "neighbor spoofing," in which they copy the area codes of local jurisdictions to make it more likely that people will pick up the phone.

•**Washington, D.C.,** has a high population of robocalls because scammers often pretend to be calling on behalf of government agencies like the IRS or ICE.

•**Robocall area codes** also tend to reflect highly-populated areas. Some regions, like parts of the Southeast region of the U.S. and southern border states, also have high percentages of robocalls mimicking those area codes.

•**This could be** because robocallers tend to target vulnerable populations, like older people, immigrants and minorities, according to a telecom source who works very closely on the robocall issue. (Courtesy axios.com)

**訃聞**

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