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Grassroots Initiatives

"How to Make a Difference" by Nicole Schultz

Policies that affect our industry can often impact our employees. With the right plan of action, your company can influence legislation that may otherwise negatively impact it.

According to Clayton Traylor, Staff Vice President for Political Operations at the National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB), there are six basic steps involved in becoming an effective advocate:

- Get organized.
- Identify and monitor issues.
- Be prepared to educate.
- Develop solutions.
- Advocate your position.
- Be politically active.

WTCA Chapters were designed to be a starting point for this type of grassroots work to take place. As you tackle each new issue within your chapter, keep the following in mind:

- Gather all the facts.
- Organize a list of key issues in order of priority.
- Develop suggested industry-wide solutions.
- Create an action plan that is simple and focused.
- Speak with one voice.

Depending on the issue at hand, there are avenues that you may want to pursue to get your opinions heard:

- Get people together to talk about the problem locally. This is where local business alliances can be a real asset. If several businesses from different market segments create a united position on an issue it will carry far greater weight with a legislator due to the broad impact it is having on a range of businesses. This is also where WTCA Chapters can build coalitions both internal to our industry and aligned as above.
- Call your radio station and make your voice heard. Reporters are always looking for a good story. Turn the issue into a human-interest item. Then call the news department and see if it is of interest to them.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. Concise points of view are always sought. Also consider asking for an audience with the local editorial review board. See what their

- issues are and provide input on issues affecting your business.
- When legislators hold town hall meetings, be in attendance and speak out during the session. Also attend city council, township and county board hearings. We live in a day when actions are being taken at these levels to restrict development through “no growth” initiatives. Success of these initiatives will be easy unless an opposing voice of reason is heard.

You, your company and your chapter can make a big difference, but nothing comes without a price. In this case that price is taking some time to write, hold meetings and speak out in public forums where policies are being set. You will be heard and once you are, you will be on your way to making a big difference.

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