

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE (FORMERLY WOODWORDS)

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Across the Board

"WTCA Open Quarterly Meeting Summary: May 3-4, 2001" by Scott Arquilla, WTCA 2001 Secretary

The purpose of the Spring Quarterly meetings was to meet with our Representatives and Senators as well as other government agencies to inform them of issues that are currently affecting our individual businesses and our industry as a whole. If most of the 40 component members in attendance were like me, they were approaching this first visit to Washington with a great deal of trepidation. There was concern that our story was too difficult to tell, that those hearing us would not understand, and that we do not have a "big time" lobbyist or the sizable funds thought to be needed to have any political clout.

My first visit was to my personal Congresswoman, Rep. Judy Biggert(IL-13). While I hoped she would be available for our meeting, it turned out that she was on the floor involved in the Education Bill proposed by the Bush Administration. I met with one of her Legislative Aids (LA), Paul Doucette, her specialist on trade issues. Generally, most meetings in Congress occur with the LA, as the elected officials are quite busy and the LAs have a much better handle on the issues. Rep. Biggert assisted our industry last Spring with a piece of legislation that was introduced in the 106th Congress, House Concurrent Resolution 252 calling for the termination of the SLA to emphasize the housing affordability issue. At present, there is a House Concurrent Resolution 45 (as well as the Senate Concurrent Resolution 4) on the floor supporting housing affordability and a competitive North American market for softwood lumber. Rep. Biggert is not a co-sponsor of this Resolution and Doucette was unaware of it. I requested Rep. Biggert's support. Doucette assured me he would follow up. Further, he reiterated Rep. Biggert is in favor of free trade. I promised a follow-up letter and a request for confirmation of her support of this Resolution.

Next, I led a delegation of 11 to a discussion with Rep. Dennis Hastert's (IL-14) LA Anthony Reed again concerning the expiration of the SLA and the pending Countervailing duty and Anti-dumping case. We were very fortunate to have Jack Parker of Eastern Building Components present as his cousin is Rep. Hastert's Chief of Staff. Relationships like this are very helpful in opening doors and improving the likelihood that our voices were genuinely heard. It became apparent in our meeting that our industry's position is not well understood as it is a more complex issue than is being presented by NAHB or the Coalition for Fair Lumber Imports. After listening intently to us and digesting the information presented, Reed said we had a very important story to tell and suggested contacting our Representatives and Senators and having them contact the Administration and the Department of Commerce to ensure our voice is clearly heard. This advice was helpful, as we had a series of meetings scheduled with the Department of Commerce, the U.S. Trade Representative, and the Coalition for Fair Lumber Imports on the next day.

My third meeting was with Joe Matal, LA for Senator Peter Fitzgerald (IL). The Senator is a "free trader" and a co-sponsor of the Senate Concurrent Resolution 4, which supports our position on free trade of lumber products in North America. I thanked Matal for the Senator's position on this matter and further explained the plight of our border members. He, too, was unaware of this loophole and the growing importation of trusses and wall panels from Canada. I explained, again, how our border state members were considering moving operations to Canada in order to compete and stay in business. We also had discussions on other key issues to our industry, such as Smart Growth and Estate Tax Relief, where I provided him with specific WTCA literature that helped to bring our industry and these key issues into better focus.

The highlight of the day was our final group meeting, arranged by Dan Holland of Clearspan Components, Inc., with Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (MS). Senator Lott came off the Senate floor to spend 20 minutes with us. He has sided with the Coalition for Fair Lumber Imports and the southern pine industry in the Southeast. He listened attentively to our comments and understood our issues and the broader issues of free trade. He is in favor of "free and fair" trade and he reiterated his position that Canada was dumping product into the U.S. at prices lower than "reasonable" costs. His constituents in the south, primarily small lumber mill operators and forest landowners, have suffered greatly with the low prices of the past eighteen months. Many mills have closed and landowners are not selling stumpage due to low prices. He personally owns 140 acres of forests in Mississippi. After harvesting most of that land in the past six months, he has replanted it with southern pine and hardwoods. He agrees that the forests are growing and sustainable. He assured us that the Clinton administration views of reducing forest access and harvesting will be reversed or modified by the Bush Administration. In closing, he requested our views on these issues and asked his staff to contact the U.S. Canadian Ambassador (former Massachusetts Governor Paul Cellucci) to look closely at the issues we presented. This meeting was extremely rewarding in that the Senator was familiar with the issues and had a very strong point of view, yet he learned from us about a point of view that has been lost in the debate that has tended to be at the extremes of this issue. While we didn't come away with a victory for free trade, we did make our point loud and clear and it appears that our issue will not be lost on Senator Lott as political decisions are made in the future.

In closing, our WTCA staff is to be complimented for their efforts in arranging our individual visits and for the information provided to present our facts to our Congressional members. This was an enormous amount of work and, once again, our staff proved their worth. All of us who attended were surprised how easy these meetings turned out to be and how well Congress listens. In fact, it became crystal clear that because we are constituents, and we employ voters, our voice is much stronger than any high paid lobbyist could possibly be. The true cost, which many try to delegate to a lobbyist, to having our voice clearly and profoundly heard is merely taking the time to get involved in a legislative meeting like this.

Because of the participants' reaction to the meetings, our Executive Committee has voted to hold our spring Board Meeting in Washington, DC for years to come. I would suggest that all our members attend our future legislative meetings in Washington to help our elected officials hear our concerns and positions on matters that affect us every day. We had many non-Board members in attendance that I am sure will never miss another meeting like this again. In order to be successful, the people that have real-life stories of how government impacts us in our daily

lives have to be heard (that's all of us!). Please plan on joining us in future meetings. Those of you who have never done this would be surprised how greatly rewarding and valuable this effort turned out to be.

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