

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE (FORMERLY WOODWORDS)

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"WTCA Goes to Washington" by Nicole Schultz

WTCA's Spring Open Quarterly meeting took members to Washington, DC for a number of days to focus on legislative issues that impact the component industry. Members met with their elected officials on May 3 and with governmental agencies on May 4. The events for this two-day legislative conference unfolded as follows:

Wednesday, May 2

Before dinner, members heard from Michael Carliner, Staff Vice President of Economics with the National Association of Home Builders as he discussed the economic impacts of SLA and its possible outcomes.

Thursday, May 3

Members got an early start to go over their notes and maps and then headed to Capitol Hill to meet with their elected officials and make their voices heard on issues impacting their businesses.

A small delegation of members met with Speaker Dennis Hastert's Legislative Aide on trade issues, Anthony Reed, to discuss the SLA. The members who were at this meeting were very impressed with Reed's knowledge on this issue and felt that our industry's position was acknowledged and understood much better than it would have been if we not had the opportunity to discuss this face to face.

The highlight of the day for most WTCA members was the meeting with Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott. WTCA members had an opportunity to gather in one of the Senator's conference rooms in the Capitol to inform him of WTCA's position on the SLA, a main focus of this legislative conference. Because the Senator has taken such a strong stance on the side of lumber producers, WTCA members knew that educating the Senator about the devastating impact SLA has had on our industry was critical to our cause.

Our industry's position on this issue is in favor of free trade with neither duties nor quotas on softwood lumber. As a result of first quotas, and now the threat of duties, truss manufacturers on border states are seeing a significant increase in truss and wall panel imports from Canada. These "remanufactured" products are exempt from either a quota or a duty, thereby encouraging Canadians to bypass the effects of a quota or duty by selling lumber to Canadian manufacturers at prices far less than the price paid by competing U.S. manufacturers. WTCA has calculated component imports increasing from \$67 million in 1995 to over \$292 million in 1999. Canadian manufacturers' pricing often has a 25 to 30 percent price advantage over U.S. manufacturers. Many U.S. manufacturers in border states have either moved or are considering moving their cutting and/or manufacturing operations to Canada.

- “I felt the meeting with Senator Lott was very productive. He appears to carry a big stick, and I felt he heard our message.” —Jack Louws, Louws Truss, Inc.
- “In our 20-minute meeting with Senator Lott, we were able to communicate our industry’s position through personal experiences and factual information about the damage the U.S./Canada lumber agreement has caused our industry. I left this meeting with the feeling that we had been heard and our industry’s position on this issue had been acknowledged by the Senator and that we can make a difference.” —Jerry Vulgaris, Reliable Truss

Friday, May 4

The events held on Friday morning gave members the opportunity to choose one of two avenues. The first group spent the morning meeting with different facets of the Department of Labor. These groups included One Stop; Welfare to Work; Job Corps; Veterans Employment and Training Services and Apprenticeship; and Training, Employer and Labor Services. All of the presenters provided WTCA members with materials about finding employees in today's tough labor market.

- “The meeting at the Department of Labor was a very well organized program with a tremendous amount of information given to all in attendance. [The presenters] showed a sincere interest in helping the employer in finding and getting a good labor force.” —Jack Dermer

Later that morning, after the meeting with the Department of Labor was complete, this group moved on to meet with OSHA. Members were relieved to hear that OSHA had the same concerns about fall protection devices being attached to trusses as WTCA. Members of OSHA were quick to assure everyone that they didn't have any plans to implement new fall protection regulations in the near future, as was feared by the component manufacturing and builder industries with the last administration.

While the first group attended meetings with the Department of Labor and OSHA, the second group participated in three separate meetings discussing lumber trade issues. One meeting was held with U.S. Trade Representative Mary Ryckman; another meeting took place with the Coalition for Fair Lumber Import’s Executive Director Scott Shotwell and the lead attorney for the Coalition, John Rogosta. The final meeting of the morning was with the U.S. Department of Commerce Office. This meeting included Chuck Riggle, Program Manager for the Anti-Dumping Case; Rick Herring, Program Manager for the CVD Case; Bernard Carreau, Deputy Assistant Secretary; and Holly Kuga, Senior Office Director.

After members finished with their morning meetings, they regrouped at the hotel for lunch. They then met with a variety of organizations at the hotel. Phyllis Eisen of the National Association of Manufactures and John Gay of the Essential Workers Immigration Coalition were present for a discussion about labor issues, and Lou Hayden and Clayton Traylor from the National Association of Home Builders were on hand to discuss issues dealing with U.S./Canada lumber trade and Smart Growth.

Later that afternoon, members heard from David Engel with HUD, who covered housing issues, and Lisa Stocker and Ken Bland of the American Forest and Paper Association who covered topics dealing with Smart Growth and fire/building code issues.

The afternoon concluded with WTCA members meeting to talk about what they had each learned at the meetings they had attended that day. For the most part, WTCA members had no idea that it was so simple to personally access their elected official's and governmental offices. The meetings were very productive with a wealth of information provided at each that will help our industry immensely as we develop industry-wide policies. Doors were opened to several agencies with which we can work closely as issues arise that affect our industry. Members found the experience very educational and rewarding.

- "I came away with the impression that we were presenting a viewpoint that had not been adequately presented before to our representatives." —Keith Kinser, Kintec LLC
- "With the number of groups calling on our elected representatives....it becomes quite apparent that if you want to have a say in any particular issue you had better be in there face to face." —Jack Dermer, American Truss
- "I was a bit leery because I hadn't been to visit my legislators before, but I really felt that it gave me a great deal of opportunity to present our case. In several instances the people I met with said that they hadn't heard our side of what was going on, and were grateful for the information." —Richard Brown, Truss Systems, Inc.

For greater depth of information on any of these meetings, please contact WTCA staff. Please consider attending our next Board and Committee meetings, which will provide the opportunity to discuss these issues in more detail.

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