



2006



SBC

LEGISLATIVE

Conference

Building Relationships

by Sean D. Shields

Scott Ward, Southern Components, shared the following perspective on his first **SBC** Legislative Conference:

No television show or movie can bring to reality the awesome size and breadth of Washington, DC. The buildings are massive and stately, and the memorials inspire pride in America's historical roots. This was my first time in our nation's Capital, and it was an experience I will never forget.

As I visited my lawmakers in their offices on "the Hill," I quickly realized how very busy everyone is as they multi-task many different jobs throughout their day. So, I was impressed when my U.S. Representative took time to meet with me personally even to the point of being late for a vote in order to speak with me concerning several issues that may have a tremendous impact

on our industry. I walked away from his office really feeling like I have a voice in the legislative process.

The conference speakers assembled by WTCA for our 2006 Legislative Conference were also extremely informative and helpful in my understanding of how our Congress functions, and the tour of the White House arranged through WTCA was probably one of the greatest things I have ever been given the opportunity to do.

My respect for Congress and its importance in our country has grown for me to a much higher level through participating in this year's Legislative Conference. This visit has made me proud of our nation and our industry, and made me realize how blessed I am to be an American. I will be back for another round next year.

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Visits to Capitol Hill



"The Legislative Conference is about being active in government, not just complaining about it. It's about realizing that a democracy requires citizen involvement. That's why we come here."

—Joe Kannapell, MiTek, Charlottesville, VA



"I enjoyed my meeting. Representative [Trent] Frank's (R-AZ) legislative aide was very knowledgeable on the bills and gave the impression the Congressman was in support of our industry on our issues. This was a great way to get involved in our government process."

—Chad Lilleberg, Shuck Component Systems, Glendale, AZ



Timing is everything. That idiom couldn't be more true when it comes to Congress, and this year's Legislative Conference was a perfect illustration. With immigrants protesting in the streets across the country, and health care costs spiraling on a seemingly uncontrollable path upward, these problems are in desperate need of immediate solutions.

Immigration reform, and its potential impact on workforce availability, was chosen as the primary issue for our industry at the conference this year. Ms. Juria Jones (see page 56), one of the conference speakers, shared how our visits to Capitol Hill came on the eve of the Senate Judiciary Committee tackling a key compromise bill on immigration. As a consequence, Senators were eager to hear our viewpoint on this issue before they voted.

The price of health care, and the subsequent cost of health insurance, is making it more and more difficult for those employers, particularly small businesses, who provide such health care for their employees, to continue to affordably provide it. This was another key issue chosen for the conference this year, and as we discovered in a meeting at the Department of Labor's Employee Benefits Security

Administration (see page 52), the Senate was prepared to vote on a key bill that would allow small businesses to band together into Association Health Plans to negotiate better insurance rates.

From various knowledgeable sources, we also learned that Congress would shortly consider legislation that would permanently repeal the estate tax, and debate another bill that would restructure a current tax policy related to timberland ownership, both important issues to our industry.

As members stormed the offices of their Congressional delegates, they found lawmakers and legislative assistants who often remembered them from past

visits, were well versed on the issues, and eager to hear their viewpoints. They brought with them a series of talking points (see page 44-48) to help frame the issues and highlight how they affect the structural building components industry. By bringing up additional issues such as workforce training, expanded health savings accounts, medical liability tort reform and the regulatory cost burden born by small businesses, our industry has already begun to address future legislation that will likely be debated during next year's legislative conference. Be sure you don't miss it!

In Pictures: **Top:** 2006 Legislative Conference attendees prepare for hill visits with a WTCA briefing. **Middle:** Jack Dermer (American Truss Systems, Inc.) (center) and Frank Klinger (Mid-Valley Truss & Door Co. (right) meet with a legislative aid for Representative Rubén Hinojosa (D-TX). **Bottom:** Carl Schoening (Truswal Systems Corporation) speaks with a legislative aid for Senator Kay Bailey-Hutchison (R-TX).

Hoyd vs. Otter

by Kendall Hoyd

"Let's get ready to rumble!"

You could almost hear that familiar phrase faintly in the background as I sat across the table from my Congressman, Representative Butch Otter, in his Capitol Hill office and brought up the issue of immigration reform. He is not a man who is afraid to take a firm position, and I found out his position on immigration was very firm. What ensued was a forty-minute, round-by-round bout over the impact immigration reform could potentially have on my workforce and the nation's economy. This occurred, not because we didn't like each other, but precisely because we have been able to develop a relationship of mutual respect over the years.

You may remember that last year in my editor's message I wrote about a visit Representative Otter paid to my truss plant (see April 2005 issue). (Of course, you may not remember. I accept the likelihood the only two people who read the article were my mom and me.) In any event, the plant tour played a crucial role in the development of my relationship with the Congressman.

I first met Otter, who is a typical business-friendly lawmaker, four years ago when I made my first trip to the annual WTCA Legislative conference. During that first meeting, he and I politely disagreed on the necessity for the countervailing and anti-dumping duties slapped on softwood lumber from Canada. The intervening visits to Washington, DC were cordial and the Congressman and his staff were always attentive to what I had to say.

...we had finally developed a familiarity with each other, which allowed for a very frank exchange of views...

During the plant tour, an opportunity to have him on my turf for once, we had our first discussion about immigration and the need for reform. Over the past two years, we've continued that conversation. Congressman Otter is of the, "no amnesty, no citizenship," to the point of, "round 'em up and deport 'em because they're lawbreakers," school of thought. Obviously, his firm views, if held by every member of Congress, could be very harmful not only to our industry, but to the entire national economy.

The reason why this year's visit to Congressman Otter's office was so interesting was that out of the four previous Legislative Conference visits, plus the plant tour, we had finally developed a familiarity with each other, which allowed for a very frank exchange of views that are, for all practical purposes, diametrically opposed to one another. The Congressman did have valid reasons for his firm position, but I was able to share with him, first-hand, the potentially disastrous effects of an immediate loss of millions of laborers and tradesman from our economy. During this meeting, I was able to speak candidly and plainly without trying to beat around the bush or be polite. He was able to stake out his position in a similar fashion, directly and without pretense.

Naturally, this mode of conversation was more efficient than my past attempts to be diplomatic. I came away with a more complete picture and understanding of Congressman Otter's stance, and I believe I shared with him facts that will help to inform his decision making in the future.

Looking back, I felt somewhat gratified, but also vaguely dissatisfied, after my first visit to Washington, DC. I think it was probably because of the lack of candor in my discussions, which was likely the result of uneasiness in disagreeing with a member of the United States Congress. It was a natural byproduct of being in unfamiliar surroundings with very important people. On this last visit, however, it became very clear to me the value of my repeated meetings with my members of Congress. I have been able to build deeper relationships with my lawmakers and their staffs, which has allowed me to dispense with formalities and get straight to business. It's actually a lot of fun. Put 'em up!

Kendall Hoyd is President of Idaho Truss & Component Co. in Meridian, ID. He served the industry as WTCA President and SBC Editor in 2005.

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Hill Visit Spotlight



Author's Note:

"Building Relationships" was the theme of this year's SBC Legislative Conference. In reality, it is the central focus to our entire legislative advocacy efforts. By talking with your lawmakers, either through emails, phone calls or visits to their offices, you are establishing a beneficial two-way path of communication. It provides your lawmaker with a credible source of information from their constituency which they can use to make decisions. It also provides you with a powerful ear of someone who can help you solve problems and make your business environment friendlier.



Immigration

In addition to the **2006 Legislative Policies & Positions** handbook created for WTCA members to use during visits with their Congressional delegates, a series of talking points were drafted to frame the most important issues facing the structural building components industry and provide guidance to lawmakers on specific pending legislation. The main issues addressed at the legislative conference this year were: immigration reform and its impact on the structural building components industry's workforce; health care and the need for additional ways to provide affordable health insurance to employees; tax reform, including the importance of permanently repealing the estate tax; workforce training and the need for additional educational funding; and, the need to reduce the regulatory cost burden borne by small businesses. Below are the talking points used during the conference, which are also available online at www.sbcleg.com.

Industry Position

Having safe and secure borders should be a top priority. However, the strong foundations of this nation and its robust economy have always depended on a vibrant immigrant population. In order for the structural building components industry to continue providing the components for affordable structures, there must continue to be a legal way for our industry to hire immigrant workers.

OPPOSE: H.R. 4437 (Sensenbrenner, R-WI), S. 1438 (Cornyn, R-TX) and S. 2454 (Frist, R-TN) because they are punitive to employers while lacking any provision for legally hiring immigrant workers.

SUPPORT: S. 2611 (Hagel, R-NE, Martinez, R-FL), S. 2612 (Specter, R-PA) and S. 1033 (McCain, R-AZ & Kennedy, D-MA) because they address much needed reforms while providing for expanded visa or guest worker programs.

Current Workforce Shortage

- A skilled and productive workforce is a critical factor in maintaining competitiveness in the manufacturing sector. Companies that manufacture structural building components are experiencing serious workforce shortages, and the pool of qualified job candidates is shrinking.
- Labor shortages in the structural building components industry have the potential to cause delays in construction and add to the cost of constructed buildings. As Congress seeks to tighten and secure our nation's borders, it is important to remain aware of the significant effects any action may have on the work force of American business.

Immigrant Labor Relied Upon

- The opportunities for young people to move up the career ladder within the structural building components industry are tremendous. Yet, according to studies done by NAM, the number of young people entering jobs requiring skilled trades continues to diminish.
- Alternatively, immigrant populations are generally eager to fill these types of jobs, perform them well, and are finding that the career development opportunities are valuable to them.

Need Guest Worker Program

- The structural building components industry pays competitive living wages, provides benefits to its employees, and presents many opportunities for career advancement and long-term job security.

- The structural building components industry is an integral part of the building construction industry, and we provide efficiently-built, cost-effective structural solutions for owners, specifiers and builders. Without a viable workforce this industry will be unable to do its part to meet the public demand for housing and commercial construction.
- It is essential that employers in the structural building components industry be able to legally hire immigrant workers to ease the nationwide manufacturing and building construction labor shortage.

Health Care

Industry Position

Unless the high costs of health insurance premiums are quickly brought under control, many manufacturers within the structural building components industry will be unable to provide their employees with adequate health benefits, and may be faced with the difficult choice of dropping health benefits entirely.

Control High Costs

- The ongoing increase in medical and insurance premium costs in this country is creating a significant barrier to high-quality, accessible health care.
- Nearly 27 million of our nation's uninsured are small business owners, employees or dependents of small businesses with less than 100 employees.

Association Health Plans (AHP)

SUPPORT: S. 1955 (Enzi, R-WY), S. 406 (Snowe, R-ME) and H.R. 525 (Johnson, R-TX), because they address much needed reforms in the health care system by creating association health plans.

- Approximately 75 percent of the structural building components industry is made up of small business owners who average less than \$5 million in annual sales and have less than 50 employees.
- Currently, they are experiencing annual health insurance premium increases averaging nearly 20 percent annually.
- The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has estimated that small businesses obtaining insurance through AHPs should experience average premium reductions of up to 25 percent, because they enable small businesses to take advantage of the same regulatory status, purchasing clout, economies of scale and administrative efficiencies that many large corporations currently utilize.

Health Savings Accounts (HSAs)

SUPPORT: S. 2554 (Enzi, R-WY), H.R. 4511 (Cantor, R-VA) and S.2549 (DeMint, R-SC) because they address much needed reforms in the health care system by enhancing individual Health Savings Accounts (HSAs).

- The structural building components industry supports enhancing HSAs by allowing the dollars saved to roll over from year to year which will enable employees to better afford high-deductible health insurance in combination with these pre-tax savings accounts.
- In addition, expanded HSAs will allow more workers to choose "catastrophic" insurance plans for major medical events, which are more affordable and will reduce the financial burden currently carried by employers and various government and non-profit entities.



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Definition:

talk•ing points: (n.)
paraphrased issues from
which a speech, presentation or interview are made.

Medical Liability Reform

SUPPORT: S. 1503 (Frist, R-TN), H.R. 3359 (Conyers, D-MI) and H.R. 4838 (Shaw, R-FL) because they address much needed reforms in the health care system through changes to medical liability litigation and medical liability insurance.

- Steadily increasing medical liability insurance rates are forcing physicians to restrict their services or close their practices. Even worse, to avoid frivolous lawsuits, medical providers are compelled to order unneeded tests and procedures solely to guard against potential malpractice claims.
- Our industry supports reserving punitive damages for egregious cases where they are justified and limiting non-economic damages to reasonable amounts, as well as requiring defendants to pay judgments in proportion to their fault.

"I had a good discussion on our issues in both of my Senator's offices. It was a good opportunity to reinforce our industry's positions. I also discovered they both are willing to support a guest worker provision in the immigration bill."

—Tom Manenti, MiTek Industries, Chesterfield, MO

Estate Tax

Industry Position

The structural building components industry supports permanent repeal of the estate tax because it will dramatically reduce the time, money and energy spent by family business owners on estate planning. In turn, it will preserve and expand employment opportunities while ensuring the continued success and vibrancy of small businesses in America.

SUPPORT: H.R. 8 (Hulshof, R-MO), H.R. 64 (Cox, R-CA), H.R. 183 (Pitts, R-PA), and S. 420 (Kyl, R-AZ) because they provide for permanent repeal of the federal estate tax.

Estate Tax Burden

- According to a recent survey conducted by the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), respondents from small and medium-sized manufacturing facilities said that the estate tax is the second greatest tax burden on their companies, exceeded only by income tax.

Temporary Repeal Costly

- According to the same survey, small and medium-sized manufacturers spend an average of \$32,000 annually on death tax planning, and nearly one-third of respondents indicated that their planning costs had significantly increased—some as much as 100 percent—since the passage of the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001.

Permanent Repeal Needed

- Efforts to further reform the estate tax will only lead to a more complex code, which means family businesses will spend even more money on estate lawyers, accountants and life insurance policies.
- Approximately 75 percent of the companies in the structural building components industry average less than \$5 million in annual sales and have less than 50 employees. Only full repeal of the estate tax will protect the owners of these family businesses who want to pass on their businesses to the next generation.

Workforce Training

Industry Position

The structural building components industry believes that to remain competitive in the global economy, America needs to do more—both publicly and privately—to educate and train the workforce of today and tomorrow.

SUPPORT: S. 1021 (Enzi, R-WY), H.R. 27 (McKeon, R-CA) and S. 834 (Bingaman, D-NM), because they provide additional funding and programs for training America's workforce. Also, the structural building components industry is supportive of any future legislation that will provide funding to meet the goals and objectives for President Bush's American Competitiveness Initiative.

Workers Are Key Resource

- Many of the manufacturing jobs that will always exist in the U.S. market, like those within the structural building components industry, are increasingly being filled by immigrant labor due to a low unemployment rate and labor demand in the U.S.
- According the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), more than 80 percent of manufacturers say they are having trouble finding qualified employees. Sixty percent of manufacturers typically reject half of all applicants as unqualified because of the lack of basic skills.
- Our workers need to have the support and resources to improve their skills in order to keep up with advancements in technology and manufacturing processes.

Additional Training Needed

- American manufacturers have become concerned about lagging graduation rates (as compared with our international counterparts) in math, sciences and engineering—academic areas the structural building components industry heavily relies upon due to the engineering and design requirements of its products.
- In concert with the training and certification our industry already provides, the structural building components industry believes manufacturers can do their part by working more closely with local schools, technical/community colleges and other post-secondary education providers to assist in shaping appropriate curriculum that prepares young people for the technically-advanced jobs now required in our industry.

American Competitiveness Initiative (ACI)

- President Bush's American Competitive Initiative (ACI) recognizes that training and development programs are critical to maintaining a skilled workforce capable of making efficient use of cutting-edge industry practices. Therefore, greater access to these community college and technical school programs is critically important for individual workers as well as for America's competitiveness.
- The structural building components industry supports the additional funding through the ACI for Community-based Job Training Grants (\$150 million to provide training for 160,000 workers or \$937 per worker). By way of comparison, an individual WTCA online Truss Technician Training (TTT) Level I, II or III course with certification costs less than \$650.
- The ACI also includes innovative Career Advancement Accounts, which will empower individuals by significantly increasing workers' resources and training opportunities like the TTT courses. These online courses have proven to be successful, with nearly 3,700 individuals having completed the TTT courses since 2002.

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www.sbcleg.com

For more information on these and other issues facing the industry, bookmark the **SBC** Legislative website and be sure to visit regularly!

Regulatory Burden



"This was the first time I met Representative [Tom] Latham (R-IA). It was a great start toward building a new relationship."

—Rick Parrino, Plumb Building Systems, Des Moines, IA

Industry Position

The structural building components industry supports the reduction of regulatory costs through a simpler tax system, health care reform that creates greater individual responsibility, pension reform that allows businesses to put more money toward the employee than plan administration, and greater oversight on the actual costs of new regulations.

Costs Are Significant

- The Office of Advocacy at the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) released a report in late 2005 concluding that small businesses bear a disproportionately high burden for complying with federal regulations.
- On a per-employee basis, firms with 20 or fewer employees spend an average of \$7,647 annually to comply with federal regulations. This is 45 percent more than firms with more than 500 employees, which spend an average of \$5,282 annually.
- The annual total burden of regulatory compliance for small businesses was \$1.1 trillion in 2004, and small businesses in the manufacturing sector bore the highest burden, at least double the cost compared to larger firms on a per-employee basis.

Tax Policy

SUPPORT: H.R. 5198 (Manzullo, R-IL) because it reforms the tax code to encourage greater work, investment and entrepreneurial activity. Also, the structural building components industry is supportive of any future legislation that will require a stronger cost-benefit review of proposed regulations.

- The current tax system is the single largest obstacle to increased economic growth. Even worse, the cost of tax compliance is 67 percent higher in small firms than the cost in large firms.
- A long-term solution calls for a new tax system that is simpler and encourages—rather than penalizes—work, investment, and entrepreneurial activity. In the short-term, tax law changes targeted to businesses will spur capital investment, and make U.S. corporations more competitive.

"By the end of the meeting, Senator [Debbie] Stabenow's legislative aide had a much stronger understanding of the need to have the ability to hire immigrant workers in our truss plants."

—Dean DeHoog, Trussway, Sparta, MI

"Rep. Putnam (R-FL)...is behind us on all of the industry's issues. He appreciated that we continue to come and remind him of our concerns."

—Jim Swain, Carpenter Contractors of America, Fort Myers, FL

"[Visiting the White House] was a great opportunity and I'm privileged to have been so near the world's seat of power and among the glorious history of our great nation."

—Tom Manenti, MiTek Industries, Chesterfield, MO

"Daddy's home." Several members felt the hair raise on the back of the necks as the unmistakable whoosh of helicopter blades grew louder. Marine One came in for a landing on the South Lawn of the White House, bringing President George W. Bush home from Mississippi, just as several legislative conference attendees were taking a rare private tour of the West Wing.

The White House

Although the site of the President's residence was chosen by George Washington, John Adams was the first President to actually live in it upon its completion in late 1800. It was formally named The White House by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1901 when he had it engraved on his stationary.

West Wing

The West Wing was originally built as a temporary office by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1902. At the time, it was intended to give the President's staff breathing room after unsuccessfully trying to share the second story of the White House with his six children.

Oval Office

In 1909, President William Howard Taft altered the shape of the Office of the President by rounding the corners. Now one of the symbols of the President, the Oval Office embraced an idea favored by George Washington that in a round room no one would be closer or farther from the President if he stood in the middle.

"It is very different to see something in person instead of through a television screen. The tour of the White House hammered home that perspective. They are real offices where real people like ourselves work everyday to solve the nation's problems."

—Frank Klinger, Mid-Valley Truss & Door Co., Harlingen, TX

"This was a very interesting experience, something I will always remember. There is so much history and protocol within the West Wing."

—Bruce Bain, Richco Structures, DePere, WI



Press Briefing Room

Originally the site of the swimming pool built by President Franklin Roosevelt to provide therapy for his polio, the Press Briefing Room was built over the pool by President Nixon to provide a work space for members of the media. This small theatre has been used since 1970 by the White House Press Corps, which opens out into the Rose Garden.

Special thanks to Tom Whatley, Eagle Metal Products, for arranging this very special tour of the White House.

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White House Tour



In Pictures: White House Tour Group (l to r): Joe Odgers, Frank Klinger, Scott Ward, Carl Schoening, Kendall Hoyd, Sherry Dermer, Jack Dermer, Peggy Klinger, Tom Whatley, Melba Whatley, David Horne, Pat Shrugue, Allen Erickson, Scott Arquilla

In Pictures: White House Tour Participants take turns at the press briefing room podium (l to r): Scott Arquilla, Sherry & Jack Dermer, Pat Shrugue, Scott Ward and Tom Whatley

Agency Visits



In Pictures: (l to r) Allen Erickson (Cal-Asia Truss), Ed Hamberger (President & CEO of AAR), Scott Arquilla (Best Homes, Inc.), Kendall Hoyd (Idaho Truss & Component Co.) and Sean Shields (WTCA Legislative & Polical Affairs Manager)

Hamberger pledged to help WTCA arrange a panel discussion during the BCMC trade show in October with the Class I railroad companies. He also committed to bringing short line railroads into the discussion through his counterpart, Richard Timmons, at the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA).

Association of American Railroads

Ed Hamberger, President & CEO

The great “iron horse” may have forged a lasting bridge across our nation’s landscape over a century ago, but today, railroads are facing a number of challenges. Last year, a group of conference attendees met with Surface Transportation Board (STB) Chairman Roger Nober to discuss their frustrations with inconsistent rail delivery service, a severe lack of adequate infrastructure and disputes over demurrage charges.

During that meeting, Chairman Nober suggested that beyond seeking assistance from the government, the structural building components industry should strive to build a relationship with the private railroads themselves. Taking that suggestion to heart, this year, conference attendees met with the President and CEO of the Association of American Railroads (AAR), Ed Hamberger.

AAR is the trade association of Class I railroads like BNSF, Union Pacific, Canadian Pacific, CN, CSX and Norfolk Southern. Like WTCA, this trade association is focused on developing programs to improve safety and efficiency, as well as enhance rail service. In addition, AAR places a strong emphasis on direct legislative advocacy by bringing rail-related related issues to the attention of Congressional and government leaders.

Initial discussion focused on the fact there were three basic alternatives currently facing the structural components industry with regard to the railroad industry. One, component manufacturers could choose to confront railroads with their problems and adopt a conflict-oriented relationship; two, manufacturers could seek out a formal dispute resolution process, much like the one offered through the STB; or, three, manufacturers could seek out ways to participate alongside rail companies to find mutually beneficial solutions. It was agreed to by all in attendance that the third alternative was the most preferable.

Hamberger and his staff explained that in their studies of rail service, they break down shipments into thirds—origin/loading, transit, destination/unloading—which correspond roughly to the amount of time cargo spends at each step of the process. Initial results concluded that railroads do an adequate job with regard to transit, but the breakdown, or inefficiency, in shipments generally occurs in what is referred to as “first mile, last mile.” As receivers of shipments, the structural building components industry finds most of its problems tied to that “last mile” of the trip.

At the conclusion of the meeting, an intriguing opportunity was agreed upon. Hamberger pledged to help WTCA arrange a panel discussion during the BCMC trade show in October with the Class I railroad companies. He also committed to bringing short line railroads into the discussion through his counterpart, Richard Timmons, at the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA).

In preparation for this discussion, WTCA staff is working the the AAR to jointly develop a list of questions for our membership to provide a foundation for the discussion. WTCA will also work to bring together our supplier shippers, like Weyerhaeuser and International Paper, and component manufacturer receivers to identify where the problems lie and explore possible solutions through AAR and ASLRRA. If you find yourself frustrated by your railroad service, you will want to be at this panel discussion. Look for more information coming soon!

U.S. Trade Representative's Office

Everett Eissenstat, Assistant Trade Representative of the Americas

Shortly after Everett Eissenstat spoke to **SBC** legislative conference attendees last year, he was offered a unique opportunity to move from the Legislative branch, where he had served as Chief Legal Counsel for the Senate Finance Committee, to the Executive branch as an Assistant Trade Representative of the Americas in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR). In this new position, he is responsible for all trade policy for North, Central and South America. Conference attendees met with him in his new office where he still had a few boxes left to unpack.

USTR is responsible for developing and coordinating U.S. international trade, commodity, and direct investment policy, and overseeing negotiations with other countries. The USTR is part of the Executive Office of the President. They also meet with governments, business groups, legislators and public interest groups to gather input on trade issues and explain the president’s trade policy positions.

In this last regard, conference participants visited with Eissenstat to share with him the structural building components concerns about U.S. trade law. Meeting attendees shared that an unfortunate aspect of current U.S. trade policy is, in the two cases that affect our industry—steel and lumber—countervailing and anti-dumping duties were imposed with no consideration of the unintended consequences on them as consumers or on the overall housing market of which the industry is a part.

They further argued that our industry should be able to purchase quality raw materials from the supplier that best meets our needs, regardless of whether they are of domestic or foreign origin. In short, members argued that U.S. trade policy should encourage free trade that increases resource availability, free-market based costing and increased quality of imported materials.

Eissenstat stated that he knew there were members in Congress, particularly Representative Jim Ramstad (R-MN), who support our industry’s views. At the end of the meeting, he pledged to help circulate our arguments with his new colleagues. He also committed to following up with Ms. Meredith Broadbent, Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Industry, Market Access and Telecommunications, to explore opportunities, like their Industry Advisory Committees, for our industry to become more involved in trade policy.



In Pictures: (l to r) Kendall Hoyd (Idaho Truss & Component Co.), Everett Eissenstat (Assistant Trade Representative of the Americas) and Scott Arquilla (Best Homes, Inc.)

Eissenstat stated that he knew there were members in Congress, particularly Representative Jim Ramstad (R-MN), who support our industry's views. At the end of the meeting, he pledged to help circulate our arguments with his new colleagues.

“I discovered my Senator, George Allen (R-VA), is pushing for additional federal funds to support more math and engineering teachers in public high schools. This is something our industry can help support him on.”

—Brian Johnson, Structural Technologies, Midlothian, VA

“The legislative assistant for Senator Bill Nelson (R-FL) remembered us from last year. We had a good meeting and found the Senator supported our industry’s position on all the issues.”

—Doug Folker, Robbins Engineering, Tampa, FL

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Agency Visits



In Pictures: (l to r) Michael Cassidy (Truss Plate Institute), Jimi Grande (Senior Legislative Office), Tom Alexander (Chief of Staff to the Assistant Secretary of Labor), Kirk Grundahl (WTCA Executive Director) and Scott Arquilla (Best Homes, Inc.)

Department of Labor

*Employee Benefits Security Administration
Office of the Assistant Secretary & Congressional Liaison Office*

"First, you win the argument, then you win the debate."

The Congressional Liaison, or lobbyist, for the Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA) used this quote by Margaret Thatcher to illustrate a point. The point was in order for ideas like Association Health Plans (AHP) to get through Congress, it was very important for small business constituents—like component manufacturers—to argue for their necessity.

As the cost of health care increases, and the price of health insurance rises with it, the need to find alternatives is becoming desperate. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has estimated that small businesses obtaining insurance through AHPs should experience average premium reductions of up to 25 percent, because they enable small businesses to take advantage of the same regulatory status, purchasing clout, economies of scale and administrative efficiencies that many large corporations currently utilize.

The argument for AHPs has been "won" in the U.S. House of Representatives for over a decade, as a bill authorizing the creation of AHPs has been passed by the House every year. However, the Senate has consistently failed to agree to a bill or offer their version of an AHP bill. That is, until this year. Senator John Enzi (R-WY) sponsored S. 1955, which allowed for the creation of AHPs, and was a bill the structural building components industry came out in strong support of (see Talking Points, page 45).

Through its enforcement of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA), the EBSA is responsible for ensuring the integrity of the private employee benefit plan system in the United States. These plans cover approximately 150 million workers and their dependents and include assets of more than \$4 trillion. They also would have direct jurisdiction over monitoring AHPs.

The timing of the meeting could not have been more perfect, as the S. 1955 was currently being debated on the Senate floor. The EBSA Congressional Liaison indicated the argument for AHPs still may not have been "won" in the Senate because it appeared the bill was a handful of votes shy of the 60 required in order to get the bill passed. He shared that, in particular, Senators in three key states (Colorado, Michigan and Louisiana) could vote either way.

Armed with that information, after the meeting an **SBC Legislative Action!** was sent to members in Colorado, Michigan and Louisiana urging them to contact their Senator to vote for S. 1955. It is through this kind of grassroots advocacy that the structural building components industry can begin to win the arguments, so that we can eventually win the debate and influence legislation that benefits the industry.

"Senator Richard Burr's (R-NC) staff was extremely knowledgeable and informed on the issues. The Senator's position on immigration and health care issues was very favorable to our industry."

—David Horne, Universal Forest Products, Burlington, NC

U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Service

Carlos Iturregui, Chief of Policy & Strategy

THEME: *Knowledge. Know the effect of immigration reform on employers.*

Protesters lined the street, filling the air with chants about liberty, freedom and a chance to live the American dream. On this particular day, it wasn't happening in the streets of L.A. or Chicago, it was occurring in front of the offices of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in Washington, DC. The same building that conference attendees entered for their meeting with Carlos Iturregui, Policy Chief for the United States Citizenship & Immigration Service (USCIS).

As part of the newly formed DHS, the USCIS mission is to "secure America's promise as a nation of immigrants by providing accurate and useful information to all those seeking to live in America; granting immigration and citizenship benefits, promoting an awareness and understanding of citizenship, and ensuring the integrity of our immigration system." Carlos Iturregui and his staff provide perspective to Congress and the Administration regarding long-term immigration policy, and analyze whether any proposed changes will have a positive or negative effect.

So, while outside they were protesting the immigration reform bill passed by the House of Representatives (H.R. 4437) and its harsh enforcement provisions. Inside, members talked with Iturregui about the Senate's version of the bill, S. 2611, which the structural building components industry had come out in strong support of (see Talking Points, page 44), because it provided for a guest worker program and expanded the allowable number of visas.

While the Senate Judiciary Committee Legal Counsel, Juria Jones (page 56) told members the day before she was confident Senate bill could pass as soon as the following Monday, Iturregui went one step farther by stating that lawmakers had already been chosen to serve on the conference committee responsible for hammering out the differences between H.R. 4437 and S. 2611. This indicated a strong belief by the Congressional leadership in both the House and Senate that S. 2611 would likely pass very soon.

Discussion quickly turned to the provisions of the bill, particularly the portion of the bill that would affect the responsibility of the employer with regard to hire of illegal immigrants. Iturregui said one key aspect of the bill would be requiring all employers to utilize an electronic employee verification system, which is currently called the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) Basic Pilot.

The SAVE employment verification program involves electronic checks of the Social Security Administration and Department of Homeland Security databases, using an automated system to verify the employment authorization of all prospective and hired employees. Iturregui said this electronic system will allow employers to immediately verify whether someone is legally employable before they offer the individual a job.

Iturregui concluded by saying it will be critical for our industry to be heard during the conference committee meetings, to ensure the final agreement does not have unintended consequences that will irreparably harm our industry's workforce. Consequently, please be prepared to take action when your assistance is requested. The conference committee's work will have a direct impact on how our industry transacts business going forward.

Continued on page 56



In Pictures: (l to r) Scott Arquilla (Best Homes, Inc.), Carlos Iturregui (Chief of Policy & Strategy) and Kent Pagel (WTCA Legal Counsel)

As part of the newly formed DHS, the USCIS mission is to "secure America's promise as a nation of immigrants by providing accurate and useful information to all those seeking to live in America; granting immigration and citizenship benefits, promoting an awareness and understanding of citizenship, and ensuring the integrity of our immigration system."

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Conference Speakers

Juria Jones

Legal Counsel, Senate Judiciary Committee

Juria Jones is a Chief Counsel for the Courts & Administrative Law unit for the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary. She has responsibility for a broad range of issues, including immigration and border security, oversight of the judiciary, and the courts. Ms. Jones also served as legal counsel to Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA), Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. In that capacity, she was responsible for such issues as immigration, civil rights, the Constitution and other issues before the Committee on the Judiciary.

It turns out, that number may be conservative—it's an estimation by the Department of Homeland Security—some policy makers in Washington, DC estimate the number of illegal immigrants currently residing in the U.S. is closer to 20 million. This only underscores the fact that our nation's borders are not as safe as they should be, and that the current immigration system is broken.

Fortunately for our industry, our founding fathers created a Congress with two chambers to provide a structural check and balance. So, even though the House passed an immigration reform bill that could be disastrous for our industry, and more importantly, for our nation's economy, it can't become law without an agreement with the U.S. Senate. That places the Senate Judiciary Committee, which has jurisdiction over immigration policy, front and center to offer up a response to H.R. 4437.

According to Jones, the bill in the Senate with the best chance for success was S. 2611. As legal counsel for the Senate Judiciary Committee, Jones is in the unique position to give conference attendees the inside scoop on what the Senate response might be.

S. 2611, if adopted, would drastically increase border security and beef up enforcement, while simultaneously bolstering the "green card" system and creating an expanded guest worker program.

At the time of her presentation, there were close to 64 amendments proposed for S. 2611, and it was estimated that close to 200 may be offered by the time this bill came up for debate. Consequently, it was difficult for Jones to say with certainty what the bill that is ultimately adopted will contain, but following are some of the highlights.

First, the bill will make provisions for the creation of a "virtual fence" at the

border between the U.S. and Mexico. It would provide funding for additional enforcement both at the border and throughout the U.S. to assist in stopping illegal border crossing and increase deportation. Second, the bill would require employers to conduct an electronic verification check on all current and prospective employees (see Agency Visits, page 53). Third, S. 2611 would create a new category for temporary low-skilled workers called the H-2C visa, which would be a renewable every three years.

Last, this bill would also create a path toward citizenship for current illegal immigrants, who would be required to immediately report to a border crossing to register their existence in the country. If they have lived and worked in the country for less than two years, they would have to leave immediately and apply for a visa through the normal process in order to return. If they have been in the U.S. for more than two years, they would have to verify their employment, pay any back taxes they may owe, and apply for a green card. Jones estimated that with the annual increases to allowable visas and green cards in the bill, it would take six years to clear out the backlog before current illegal immigrants could obtain "citizenship."

Jones concluded that even if the measure passes the Senate, something she was confident would occur, it would have to go to a conference committee—made up of both Senators and Representatives—to hammer out the differences between S. 2611 and H.R. 4437. The structural building components industry will need to take an active role in monitoring this compromise and contacting lawmakers to ensure the guest worker visa programs remain part of the final legislation that will ultimately go to President Bush for his signature.



In Pictures:

Top: 2006 WTCA President Don Groom introduces reception speaker, Juria Jones (Legal Counsel, Senate Judiciary Committee). **Middle:** Jones addresses conference attendees at Wednesday night's reception at Washington Court Hotel.

Bottom: Jones spends time talking to Dwight Hikel (Shelter Systems Limited) and Kirk Grundahl (WTCA Executive Director) after her presentation.

Continued on page 58

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Many thanks to the following suppliers for their generous sponsorship of Wednesday's reception at the Washington Court Hotel.

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Conference Speakers

There was a sense of irony in the room when finally, at the sixth annual Legislative Conference, a member of Congress walked into a room full of component manufacturers and, without prompting, began talking about the importance of the proposed negotiated settlement of the softwood lumber dispute between the U.S. and Canada. The only thing that wasn't surprising about the occurrence was that the message was being delivered by U.S. Representative Donald Manzullo (R-IL), Chairman of the House Small Business Committee and champion of the manufacturing sector. He understood the plight of the structural building components industry, and he was there to deliver the good news.

With roots in the industrial suburbs of northern Illinois, Rep. Manzullo has witnessed first-hand the flight of manufacturing out of the U.S. and the detrimental effect it has had on communities across the country. Conference attendees

Donald Manzullo

Chair, House Committee on Small Business

In 2006, U.S. Representative Donald Manzullo (R-IL) is continuing his mission to restore manufacturing in America and create good-paying jobs. In his sixth year as Chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Small Business, Representative Manzullo has held more than 60 hearings on the state of manufacturing in America and introduced numerous pieces of legislation to make U.S. companies more competitive so they can expand and create jobs. He also founded the 80-member House Manufacturing Caucus, which he chairs. Representative Manzullo has earned the reputation as Congress' champion of manufacturing.

witnessed the impact of that experience, as the Midwestern Congressman jumped up on his soapbox to talk about the important role manufacturers and small businesses play in our nation's economy.

According to Manzullo, from the time Moses asked God to bless his hands that they might do good work, up to the modern era, mankind has survived and prospered through the hard work of one's hands. Unfortunately, in America today, there has been a dramatic shift away from the trades and manufacturing skills, where working with one's hands is essential, to a service-based economy. The Congressman contended the abandonment of manufacturing was a trend that needed to be reversed.

He pointed squarely at his generation as one that was to blame. Those that worked in manufacturing facilities told their sons and daughters they didn't have to work in the plant; that they were above work in the trades or manufacturing. Manzullo asserted that vocational schools were stigmatized, and apprenticeships were abandoned as more and more young people opted to enroll in colleges and universities.

Over the course of two generations, America lost its competitive edge over foreign manufacturers, and the shortage of a dedicated manufacturing workforce prompted many companies to move overseas or close completely. Manzullo stressed that in order to rebuild the manufacturing base that once drove our nation's economy, more support needed to be given to trade schools, technical and community colleges and even high schools to encourage young people back into skilled trades—back to working with their hands.

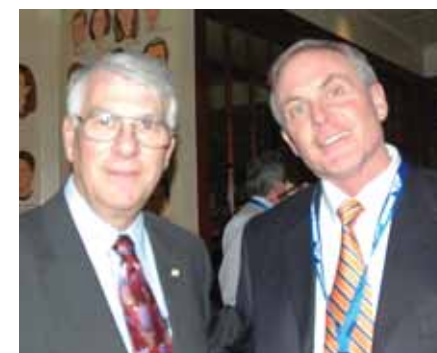
Finally, Manzullo thanked everyone in the room for traveling to Washington, DC to meet with their elected officials. He pointed out these meetings are impor-

"We are currently installing some new machinery in our plant and Representative Donald Manzullo (R-IL) agreed to come take a tour of the plant around Memorial Day after the equipment is up and running."

—Mike Karceski, Atlas Components, Inc., Rockford, IL

tant for our industry to have because they develop relationships. He then gave everyone an assignment: to invite their lawmaker on a tour of their manufacturing plant. His point was simple, that lawmakers meet numerous constituents every day. The best way to cement the structural components industry and our issues into their minds is to show them first hand our industry's products and manufacturing process.

The Congressman pointed out the power of manufacturing is that you have a physical place where you can show someone the fruit of your hands. On Friday morning, the WTCA Board of Directors passed a resolution that will capitalize on this fact. To find out more, read this issue's installment of **Adventures in Advocacy** on page 92.



In Pictures:

First: U.S. Representative Donald Manzullo spoke to conference attendees during Wednesday night's dinner. **Second:** (l to r) Jim Swain (Carpenter Contractors of America), Doug Folker (Robbins Engineering), Ted & Linda Kolanko (84 Components), and Rick & Katrina Cashman (Florida Forest Products) listen attentively to Manzullo's presentation. **Third:** Manzullo (left) takes time for a photo with constituent Mike Karceski (Atlas Components). **Fourth:** Attendees enjoy dinner at The Palm Restaurant.

Continued on page 60

Manzullo gave everyone an assignment: to invite their lawmaker on a tour of their manufacturing plant. His point was simple, that lawmakers meet numerous constituents every day. The best way to cement the structural components industry and our issues into their minds is to show them first hand our industry's products and manufacturing process.

Supplier Sponsor:

Many thanks to MiTek Industries, Inc. for their generous gold sponsorship of Wednesday's dinner at The Palm Restaurant.



Conference Speakers

Gary O'Malley

Legislative Director, Weyerhaeuser Company

Gary O'Malley is responsible for directing Weyerhaeuser Company's corporate issues management process. This includes ensuring the company is efficiently and effectively addressing selected public policy issues. Prior to assuming this position in 1991, Mr. O'Malley was manager of resource issues and providing primary public affairs support to issues related to the company's forest resource base. Since joining the firm in 1977, Mr. O'Malley has held additional positions with the Corporate Communications and Tax departments.

The dispute between the United States and Canada over softwood lumber has been going on since 1792—literally the origins of our country. The latest chapter in this conflict initially led the structural building components industry to begin hosting an annual legislative conference in Washington, DC in the hopes of informing members of Congress about the detrimental impact it was having on the industry, and to solicit their assistance in securing a resolution.

O'Malley has been to every one of those conferences, and he congratulated the industry for its determination and perseverance which had contributed in no small way to the latest announced negotiated settlement to the softwood lumber dispute. He pointed out that in the beginning of the latest dispute, affectionately known as "Lumber IV," there were numerous interests involved in providing perspective with respect to the conflict. Over the years, some of

the extreme positions have lost any influence they had in the debate, leaving a few credible voices to help shape a settlement. Fortunately, the structural building components industry was one of those credible voices.

O'Malley pointed out one of the primary lessons learned in this dispute was that grassroots efforts made a significant impact. Through our industry's solid fact gathering and logical presentation, we brought a strong, credible message about the unintended consequences created by the countervailing and anti-dumping duties (CVD/AD) imposed on Canadian softwood lumber. That messaging was successful in defeating a potentially detrimental "duty as cost" bill moving through Congress that would have increased the duties, and subsequently the price of lumber, significantly.

It also succeeded in building awareness on Capitol Hill of the harmful effects of the Byrd Amendment, a protectionist trade law that essentially created a double benefit for targeted companies: first, through an increase in prices due to a tariff-induced reduced supply; and second, through the distribution of tariff dollars to the petitioning companies that already gain the benefit from the increase in prices. Through perseverance, our industry was able to help gain support for a full repeal of the Byrd Amendment, which will go into effect in 2007.

Most importantly, the industry's grassroots efforts succeeded in building important relationships with key individuals involved in the dispute. O'Malley pointed specifically to Congressional staffers like Everett Eissenstat, who had worked for Senate Finance Committee Chairman Charles Grassley (R-IA), and Jim Mendenhall, one of the chief negotiators in the dispute with the U.S. Trade Representative's Office. Those relationships, while instrumental in reaching the current softwood lumber settlement, will potentially be even more beneficial going forward as our industry seeks to build awareness of the need for down-

"Kudos to WTCA staff! Although I am a 'dirt road' guy, thanks to the talking points and speakers I felt very confident and prepared for my meeting with Representative [Spencer] Bachus (R-AL)."

—Joe Odgers, Bama Truss & Components, Shelby, AL

stream users to be involved in determining trade remedies (duties) on foreign imports (see Agency Visits on page 51).

O'Malley warned the negotiated settlement was not final; there are a number of details that still need to be hammered out, but the basic framework has been agreed upon. Ultimately, the settlement is a victory for the structural building components industry and should help everyone's bottom line. It will help create certainty in an otherwise volatile relationship that currently impedes good long-term planning with respect to lumber supply.



In Pictures:

First & Second: Gary O'Malley addresses attendees regarding the recent softwood lumber negotiated settlement. **Third & Fourth:** Attendees enjoy dinner and networking at Smith & Wollensky.

Supplier Sponsors:

Many thanks to the following suppliers for their generous sponsorship of Thursday's reception at the Washington Court Hotel and dinner at Smith & Wollensky.

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Silver Sponsor (reception):

Wood Truss Council of the Capital Area (WTCCA)



Continued on page 50

Looking to the Future



In Pictures: WTCA Legislative Chairperson Allen Erickson (Cal-Asia Truss) has attended all six of WTCA's Legislative Conferences.

"My Senator, David Vitter (R-LA), was very interested in a plant tour of our facility and this may be of great help to us in the future."

—Scott Ward, Southern Components, Shreveport, LA

"Our meeting with Representative [Solomon] Ortiz (D-TX) was very positive. He knew the issues and was open to all our views. At the end of the meeting, they asked us if they could contact us for our support!"

—Jack Dermer, American Truss Systems, Houston, TX

"I appreciated that my Representative, David Price (D-NC), took the time to meet with me; we had a good discussion on immigration."

—Mike Walsh, Stock Building Supply, Raleigh, NC

Building Relationships... One Step at a Time

by Allen Erickson

Before you run, you walk, but before you walk, you crawl. I have a lot of passion for our efforts to build a world-class grassroots legislative advocacy movement within the industry. While we are making significant progress toward that goal, it has taken determination and persistence to get to this point. I've attended all six of the WTCA legislative conferences, and I'm honored to have the opportunity to share with you a little of what I have learned.

When I attended the first legislative conference in 2001, I was not alone in being new to the political environment. Previously, I had only been to Washington, DC as a tourist. While I had seen the Capitol building before, I thought of it more as a monument than the actual seat of government. However, that illusion quickly dissipated as I attended my first lawmaker meetings. That year, we also had the fortune of meeting with then Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-MS), who quickly learned, much to his discomfort, our industry did not see eye to eye with him regarding the softwood lumber dispute between Canada and the U.S.

In those early years, I paid closest attention to the visits to "Capitol Hill" and my meetings with my Senators and Representatives and their legislative aides. Over the years, I have discovered that while those meetings are essential for building relationships and should remain the primary focus of the conference, much can also be accomplished by meeting with the innumerable federal agencies located a stones-throw from that giant marble rotunda.

I also learned over the years that it is normal to feel as if you haven't accomplished much after your first meeting with a lawmaker. First, you feel a little uncomfortable and out of your element. Second, the meeting itself is usually only ten to fifteen minutes. Finally, no one in the meeting knows each other, so it's difficult to get through all the "meat" WTCA staff provides for you to discuss during the meeting. The truth is really a punch line from an old joke, "First you have to get their attention." This rarely happens with a single visit.

The number one thing learned by those who have regularly participated in the legislative conference is that it's all about building relationships. The softwood lumber dispute is a perfect example. In 2001, we met with lawmakers and shared our industry's position, but many thought we were ineffective. Yet, we persisted in talking to people working in various agencies and serving on various committees. We always got good feedback but had little actual results to show.

Still we persevered. Year after year we returned to Washington, DC, and diligently updated lawmakers, legislative aides and agency staff on the status of the softwood negotiations. We listened to what they said, and incorporated it into our presentations. Most importantly, we made allies. We honed our message and supported it with verifiable facts. Along the way, we gained credibility with those we petitioned because we abandoned hyperbole in favor of taking the role of the honest broker.

Those closest to the negotiations learned our suggested solutions were truly solutions, not personal victories. In the end, WTCA did not settle the softwood dispute, nor did we have a seat at the negotiating table. We did, however, educate many who were, and help open their minds so that solutions could be found. We know this because the people we have established relationships with along the way have told us as much.

At the legislative conference this year they told us to continue to preach our reasoned and well thought out positions, and they told us how important it is to come back. Truly, it is an effort that gives us more than we sow, and it is an effort we need to continue as an industry.

Allen Erickson is Executive Vice President of Cal-Asia Truss in Concord, CA. He has served the industry as WTCA Legislative Committee Chair since 2003.

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