

The idea of building relationships with your elected officials is more than just hot air. Become their trusted ally and you just might become a part of their construction decision-making process.

business issues

CAPITOL GAINS

BY BRIAN RAFF

THE PERCEPTION THAT CONGRESS moves slowly—if at all—to get things done is an old one and certainly not unfounded.

As such, it can be difficult if not impossible to appreciate how important and effective a relationship with your elected officials can be to your business and local economy. But remember that the senators and representatives that you elect (whether they realize it or not) are there for one reason: to represent your interests and those of your fellow employees. By getting to know your members of Congress and educating them on the benefits of steel construction, you have the potential to not only increase your business and bring new projects to your area, but also to raise the profile of our industry as a whole and even help boost the nation's economy.

Knowledge Gap

Your legislators receive hundreds if not thousands of phone calls, emails and visits from constituents every day on a variety of topics including taxes, healthcare, transportation, jobs and the economy. But remember that one senator or representative cannot possibly be an expert on all of these complex issues.

The same is true of the staffers that work for members of Congress. In many cases the staffers, while highly motivated, are relatively young. According to a recent *Washington Times* article, "Most Senate staffers have worked in the Capitol for less than three years. For most, it is their first job ever. In House offices, one-third of staffers are in their first year, while only one in three has worked there for five years or more." In conjunction with high turnover rates, congressional employment has steadily declined to more than 10% below 1979 staffing levels.

With Congress' diminished industry experience and high turnover rate, AISC/NSBA members have a terrific opportunity to help fill these critical knowledge gaps as they relate to steel design and construction. And it's easy to do. Here are three simple steps for getting in touch with your representatives in Washington to educate them on the benefits of building with steel:

Step 1: Identify your elected officials. Visit www.aisc.org/action, enter your zip code in the "Find Your Officials" search field and click "GO." Once you have identified your elected officials, you can learn more about them as well as how they have voted on key political and economic issues.

Step 2: Write to them. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees the right of all citizens to communicate with their elected representatives. This is a right that Americans are fortunate to have but don't exercise nearly

enough. With just one click on AISC's Actions page, you can write your congressmen or congresswoman on predetermined topics like investing in American jobs or strengthening Buy America requirements, or compose your own message.

Step 3: Follow up with a phone call or a personal visit. Corresponding by phone or by letter/email can be effective for getting your issue "on the books," but there is nothing like a face-to-face meeting to really communicate your "ask" with a sense of urgency and importance. Keep in mind that visiting Washington, D.C., can be exciting, but inviting your elected official to your design office or fabrication shop can give them critical perspective on what your company actually does to build your community, and will ultimately help you develop a better overall relationship as a fellow neighbor and concerned citizen.



▲ Some municipalities, like Chicago, have strong relationships with steel for public projects, but others can benefit from outreach from our industry.

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One of the most important things you can do as you build your relationship with your members of Congress is to tell them what they need to know about steel design and construction in their state or congressional district. They will want to know:

- ▶ How many of their voters work at your company or live in the area?
- ▶ What are some of the issues your company is dealing with, and how can they help?
- ▶ What do they need to know in order to improve the local design and building construction market and improve employment rates?
- ▶ How will their votes and key pieces of legislation affect your company and community?

And it works! This spring, Dale Ison, general manager of Florida Structural Steel (AISC/NSBA member, AISC Certified fabricator) met with Congresswoman Kathy Castor (D-Fla.) in Washington, D.C., Congresswoman Castor was very supportive and generous with her time and even expressed interest in visiting Florida Structural Steel's facility, which is in her district. She followed through on her offer later that month, visiting the shop and generating some great local press on infrastructure spending priorities and Buy America provisions.

This is the second year in a row that a representative has visited an NSBA member's facility as a result of NSBA's Washington, D.C., meetings. In 2012, Congresswoman Vicky Hartzler (R-Mo.) visited DeLong's, Inc. (AISC/NSBA member, AISC Certified fabricator) in Jefferson City following a meeting with Gary Wisch, vice president of engineering at DeLong's.

We realize that visiting your legislator for the first time can be intimidating, and we're happy to work with you to help schedule your visit as well as provide talking points, fact sheets and other supporting material (e.g., construction market, labor and employment statistics) to make your "ask" clear and concise.



- ▲ Building bridges with your members of Congress can help bring their attention and influence to construction in their (and your) home states or districts.

AISC PAC

In addition to building relationships with our elected officials on a district-by-district or state-by-state basis, AISC also recognizes the importance of a more collective approach. In response to requests from many of our members who want to leverage and pool their individual investments in ways that can give meaningful and long-term support to our industry, AISC has established a Political Action Committee—AISC PAC—to support candidates for federal office who share our appreciation of the vital role of structural steel in our national economy. (Visit www.aisc.org/AISCPAC to learn more.)

As an association, we will work hard to help elect supportive candidates as a long-term investment in our industry's future. Investment in the structural steel industry is too important to let other people make the rules that govern it, and every day federal legislators hear from industries and special interests whose goals are not consistent with ours. Whether the issue involves Buy America procurement, trade rules, funding, safety and the environment or even federal building standards, the structural steel industry needs strong and persuasive advocates.

If you would like to set up a visit with your elected officials in Washington, D.C., or at home, please contact AISC and let us help. Let's take action together and ensure that our elected leaders understand how critical the steel design and construction industry is to a full economic recovery. **MSC**

SteelDay

SteelDay is a great opportunity to get your elected officials better acquainted with structural steel. The steel industry's largest educational and networking event takes place on October 4, 2013. Over the past four years, SteelDay has seen more than 250 events each year all across the country, including visits to structural steel fabrication shops, steel mills, steel service centers, HSS producers, bender-rollers, galvanizers and job sites.

Last year, 11 governors officially recognized the structural steel industry's contribution to America's infrastructure and proclaimed September 18, 2012 as SteelDay in their respective states. Please consider SteelDay as just one of many tools in your belt that you can use to establish and strengthen your relationship with your federal, state and local officials. (Visit www.aisc.org/steelday for more information.)