

business issues

REPRESENTING STEEL

BY BRIAN RAFF

AISC represents and provides guidance on steel not only to industry experts and the general public, but also to our elected officials.

A QUICK INTERNET SEARCH of the term “AISC” appropriately provides a direct link to the AISC home page.

However, most search engines provide other “searches related to AISC,” which include the *Code of Standard Practice*, AISC 341-05 (*Seismic Provisions for Structural Steel Buildings*), AISC certified fabricators, seminars, shapes, scholarships and, of course, the *AISC Manual*. What these related searches don’t show, and what members of our industry often forget about, is AISC’s involvement in government relations and legislative action.

The purpose for our involvement in these issues? To ensure a level playing field for domestically built steel buildings and bridges—a battle that is fought on multiple fronts.

For example, did you know that in 2011, “Wood First” legislation proposed in Oregon would have created a preference for the use of wood for any project up to six stories constructed with any public funds in the whole state? One version of the bill would also have allowed the state to pay up to a 10% premium over the low bid to use Oregon wood. Obviously, this would have had a catastrophic effect on the ability of our member fabricators to compete for the structural framing packages on public projects in Oregon. Not only that, but had this legislation been successful, it could have set the stage for similar initiatives in other states and perhaps even at the federal level.

In response, AISC stated its official position on the matter and shared these points with members of the Oregon state legislature,

the state’s U.S. senators and representatives in Washington, D.C., and the governor. AISC staff and regional member fabricators also worked with industry allies such as the Ironworker Management Progressive Action Trust (IMPACT) and the American Iron and Steel Institute (AISI) to ensure the entire steel industry was united against this piece of legislation, which would have had an extremely negative effect on our members.

The original bill was voted down, but there is always a chance for reintroduction, and we will continue to monitor the situation in Oregon as well as other states to ensure a level playing field for our members.

Elected officials rely on industry organizations like AISC to provide broad background information as well as acute expertise.

Better Design

Outside of material interests, AISC also looks for opportunities to support elected officials and federal agencies in their efforts to improve the design and construction industry.

In May, NSBA staff met with Beth Osbourne, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Transportation Policy, in Washington to talk about the requirements under MAP-21 (our most recent transportation reauthorization bill) for developing Performance Measures and Asset Management plans and how NSBA can contribute to that process. Our members bring a great deal of practical experience and technical expertise to bridge design, fabrication and construction, and we have offered our assistance to the U.S. DOT as they work to meet the bridge inspection requirements of MAP-21 and put forth bridge inspection protocols to protect against future disasters.

Action Against Words

In addition to working with officials and speaking out against unfair advances from other material industries, we also work to ensure that steel isn’t unfairly represented in the press. NSBA recently objected to statements published in a June 20 *Wall Street Journal* article titled “U.S. Icons Now Made of Chinese Steel.” The article concluded that the U.S. structural steel industry is idle and domestic bridge expertise is lacking, based on New York City’s Verrazano-Narrows Bridge project, which features seldom-used orthotropic bridge deck design and is currently being repaired with steel made in China.



Brian Raff is NSBA’s marketing director. You can reach him at raff@aisc.org.

NSBA refuted that these assumptions about the domestic steel bridge industry should not be based on a single U.S. project. In fact, significant activity in the U.S. building and bridge markets shows that the American structural steel industry is robust and domestic steel fabricators do have the sophistication, diversity, experience and capacity to meet all U.S. project requirements.

NSBA's advocacy efforts, along with those of other industry associations and member companies, prompted U.S. Congressman Michael Grimm of New York to write a letter to the president of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), urging him to reconsider a domestic source for the 15,000 tons of steel required for this project.

In this letter dated June 26, 2013, Rep. Grimm states:

“With unemployment still high and our nation just beginning to recover from an economic recession, it is crucial now, more than ever, to ensure we invest American dollars into manufacturing here at home and not overseas in China. Further, the acquisition of this steel from a country such as China, which has long engaged in unfair trade practices, currency manipulation and government subsidization of the steel industry to the detriment of domestic manufacturers, is especially egregious. When combined with their lax environmental and labor standards, I cannot help but call into question the product quality the MTA can expect to receive for the supposed ‘cost of savings’ associated with purchasing steel in China.”

Accuracy and Advocacy

While AISC focuses the majority of its efforts on technical and market-related design and construction issues, it's crucial to remember our important role in advocacy and legislative action in an ever-increasing competitive political landscape. Elected officials rely on industry organizations like AISC to provide broad background information as well as acute expertise, as they and their staff become inundated with conflicting information and rely on our know-how to minimize confusion and provide an accurate account of our industry—as well as to ensure that others aren't attempting to unfairly legislate a leg up on the competition. (Consider what might have happened if the steel industry decided to ignore the Oregon situation.)

AISC and NSBA look forward to continuing to represent our members on these important issues, and we hope that our members will join us. To learn more about issues that AISC and the steel industry are currently facing, and to get involved, visit our Legislative Action page at www.aisc.org/Action. **MSC**



FHWA administrator Victor Mendez meets with Howard University students at NSBA's 2011 SteelDay event in Washington, D.C.

AISC PAC

In response to requests from many of our members, who, over the years, have wanted to give meaningful and long-term support to our industry, AISC established a Political Action Committee—AISC PAC—in 2012 to support candidates for federal office that share our appreciation of the vital role of structural steel in our national economy. The fact is that every day, federal legislators hear from industries and special interests whose goals are not consistent with AISC and its members. Whether the issue involves Buy America procurement, trade rules, infrastructure funding, safety, the environment or even federal building standards, AISC believes that the structural steel industry needs strong and persuasive advocates. Ultimately, supporting candidates that support our industry provides a mechanism for long-term investment in our collective future. If you would like to learn more about AISC PAC, visit www.aisc.org/AISCPAC.