

January/February 2000

## President's Message



ROGER J. GIBBS

### "Your Viewpoint Can Make a Difference" by Roger J. Gibbs

If you believe that your individual vote makes a difference—and I think you should—how much more of a difference could your individual voice make if you used it to establish relationships with your local, state and federal government representatives?

I find it very important to be involved in the legislative process in this country, and I can say from experience that taking the time to communicate my viewpoints to my elected representatives does make a difference. In my discussions with my Iowa state legislators, I have discovered that they value the opinions of their constituents much more than those of lobbyists. The problem they must confront is that the former rarely communicate their ideas and opinions, while the latter make a living on promoting their viewpoints. Our legislative representatives have no choice but to listen to whomever is more vocal on an issue. Therefore, as constituents—and effective businesspeople—it is very important to make our voices heard on a regular basis.

Moving a step beyond phone calls, faxes and conventional letters, email has made communicating with our legislators virtually instantaneous. I personally prefer using email because it is so quick and easy. I keep all of the addresses for my state and federal legislators on my computer, so that contacting them is always only a click away. I always get a response; therefore, I am certain that at least my position or concerns have been considered.

WTCA provides a helpful avenue for gathering information on issues and responding to the appropriate people. Legislative Alerts are sent to our members when an issue that is important to the component industry arises. This information is also kept up-to-date on the association's web site at [www.woodtruss.com](http://www.woodtruss.com). In many cases WTCA has already drafted a response that you can copy onto your letterhead and send to your legislators. It's also a good idea to add your own personal touch to the letter. This way they see you took the time to evaluate the issue and register your opinion.

Something else I do that I feel is very important for my business and the industry as a whole is for each of us to attend our state's legislative session. My state Senators and Representatives are always willing to meet with me and to take into consideration how a certain bill that is up for debate might affect my business or the component industry at large. I have found that our legislators are particularly interested to know how the decisions they are making affect the people living and working in their district.

What is even more advantageous than developing relationships with your representatives once they are at the Capitol is to make regular contact with them before they go into legislative session. In my area, our local homebuilders' association invites legislators to a regular monthly meeting. This type of forum creates a situation in which issues that affect the construction industry are focused on specifically. WTCA chapter meetings are another great venue where this kind of focused dialogue can take place.

Ultimately, the entire exercise of getting involved in the legislative process helps you and our industry take another step toward "putting a human face on the component industry" in your area. In addition to positively impacting the health of your business, this kind of involvement helps our elected officials connect a face and a name to the issues they encounter and the decisions they make. It is easy to make a decision that will have a negative impact on an impersonal entity, like a truss, but it is much more difficult to cast a vote that will negatively affect a living, breathing industry that is led by individuals that legislators know and have seen, who value both their businesses and their relationships.

So make your voice heard. Take the opportunity to develop relationships with your legislators seriously. You can make a difference!

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