



"Chapter Involvement Helps Defeat 'Smart Growth' Initiatives" by Nicole Schultz

By staying abreast of local issues and taking action on the events that may impact their companies, WTCA Chapters are reaping the rewards of having a voice in the legislative process.

One legislative issue that is becoming an increasing concern for many WTCA Chapters goes by different names, but is most commonly referred to as "Smart Growth." This amendment/initiative, which has been introduced in a number of states, is threatening to damage our industry in a variety of ways from controlling the number of people who would be allowed to move into a given state to taking development control away from local communities. In general, such initiatives would also drive up housing prices and cause thousands of people in the construction industry to lose their jobs.

When Dennis Wilson, a division manager for Bartuss and President of WTCA's Colorado Truss Manufacturers Association (CTMA), heard that the Citizens Management of Growth Amendment was introduced in Colorado last year, his chapter was quick to help. Initially, Dennis called the other CTMA board members to inform them of the issue and invited a representative from the Coloradoans for Responsible Reform (CRR) to speak at their next chapter meeting. CTMA immediately took a supportive role in the established CRR plan.

The Colorado Chapter knew that educating the voters in their state about this amendment's devastating effects was key. They began by distributing flyers that they had written as well as informational sheets produced by the Colorado Home Builders Association and the Rocky Mountain Lumber Dealers Association. CTMA also placed stickers about the amendment on outgoing mail and on flyers in paychecks in an effort to inform everyone who depended on the construction industry about the importance of voting against the amendment.

CTMA actively wrote letters to their elected officials and encouraged others to do the same. They included newspapers in their efforts by having WTCA-National write a sample letter to the editor which was published in their local paper. Short of time, CTMA made a financial contribution to run a media-blitz that informed the public about the amendment before the election.

After months of work, all of the participating groups were rewarded for their efforts. On November 7, 2000, voters in the state of Colorado soundly defeated the amendment with a vote of 1.19 million to 516,947. Happy with the results, Dennis Wilson explained that, "The initial outcome of this vote was in our favor and we know that in some small way our efforts helped." CTMA felt that the work that they put into educating voters on this issue paid off. They now realize the impact a chapter can have in dealing with legislative issues.

The threat of this type of legislation was not defeated by the vote in Colorado. Although the people of Colorado voted to stop the Citizens Management of Growth Amendment, Wilson mentioned that currently there are more than 40 separate bills before the Colorado State Legislature that replace it. CTMA plans to stay informed on this issue and take action with the coalitions that were developed through this process when needed.

Similar legislation has been proposed in other states as well. Recently, Keith Kinser, President of WTCA's Kentucky Chapter (WTCA-KY) and an owner of Kintec, was made aware that the governor of his state plans to propose legislation dealing with growth management during Kentucky's next legislative session. WTCA-KY is monitoring the progress of the proposed legislation via the State Legislature's web site and has requested a seat at the table if the proposed Smart Growth Task Force is created. Kinser notes that, "We as truss manufacturers would probably not have any involvement at all in this process were it not for the existence of the Kentucky Chapter. It provides a framework for our industry to be able to deal with legislative and code issues as a unified voice that will be perceived to have much greater legitimacy than a single company acting alone."

Chapters can have a powerful influence on the legislative process, especially when they stay informed about issues that could adversely affect our industry. Being in a Chapter that is active legislatively enables the group to make a difference locally and will allow other chapters to use that experience to build success in their area.

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