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Human Faces

Making a Difference in D.C. by Roy Schiferl

We are a country made up of representation." These were the words of Mary Estelle Ryckman, Deputy Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Canada, when I, along with other members of WTCA, met with her in Washington D.C. in early May. We have all heard these words before, but we weren't meeting with our Congressional Representative, we were meeting Ms. Ryckman to discuss the effects of the recently expired Softwood Lumber Agreement (SLA) with Canada. There was a sense of frustration that the secondary lumber market was not going to be included in any future agreement with Canada, and there did not seem to be any progress. Suddenly, Ms. Ryckman's words made sense to me.

She also told us that, "In D.C., the decisions are made on Capitol Hill." At that moment it became apparent to me that if we were to make any progress, we needed to work with our Congressional Delegation. I was in Washington, D.C. with Jack Louws to meet with our Washington State Congressional Delegation on an individual basis to discuss SLA anyway, so we decided to take the representation thing seriously.

Jack and I spent both days, May 3 and 4, meeting with all nine of the State of Washington's Congressional Representatives and two Senators. The results of our meetings even surprised us. Our country is made up of representation! One on one meetings with your representatives do work. They may or may not agree with you, but at least your voice is being heard because their districts are important to them.

We were looking for someone to become more involved in our cause, someone who cared about the plight of the secondary softwood lumber manufacturer. We needed someone from our State of Washington to become interested enough to take the time to get involved, because as a state that borders Canada, we find that they are underselling trusses and wall panels and quickly consuming our market. For some manufacturers it has become a situation of survival.

We found that we could make a difference. We met with Ashley Cohen, Legislative Assistant to Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn. Ashley informed Jack and me that Congresswoman Dunn is the ranking Republican on the House Trade Committee. She said that SLA was something Ms. Dunn considered to be important. We felt that we had an ally in the Congresswoman. Shortly after returning to Seattle, I informed our WTCA staff. They contacted Congresswoman Dunn's office and met with Virgil Cabasco, her Chief of Staff. The initial meeting did not produce strong results, but staff pursued this with follow-up meetings. At the same time, I contacted Travis Sines, the District Director at Congresswoman Dunn's local office.

On July 6, Jack and I met with Congresswoman Dunn in her local office. We found the amount of

attention and conversation to be different in the local office. You become the top priority without any distractions. That meeting was the catalyst to getting things started.

Congresswoman Dunn pledged her support to our issue. Since then, Congresswoman Dunn has sent a letter to the Department of Commerce (DOC) and the United States Trade Representative Office explaining our plight, and pledging her support for our cause. Also, Congresswoman Dunn instructed Travis Sines to do a field trip through our plant to learn how our businesses operate. Talk about putting a human face on the truss industry! Congresswoman Dunn's office has agreed to "carry our torch" in the House of Representatives.

Since our meetings with Congresswoman Dunn and her staff, Jack and I have met with the Office of Governor in Washington State, and have persuaded him to write a letter to the DOC on our behalf. Also, I have been asked to give information to several local government agencies on SLA. Finally, Congresswoman Dunn is scheduled to speak at our local Chapter of WTCA in 2002. (She was originally scheduled to speak in 2001, but it had to be postponed because of the September 11 attacks.)

Your voice can be heard! Abraham Lincoln said, "Ten voices are louder than ten thousand silent people." We need all WTCA members to take their passions on these types of issues and create some action. You can truly make a difference, but only if you do something!

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