



Editor's Message

The Need for People Power, Not Powerful People

by Kendall Hoyd

"We need to talk about grassroots politics because it is truly the only kind in which we component manufacturers, by and large, can participate."



Thanks, Libby. Another subject about which I am supposed to write, but know little or nothing. Yes, it is true that if I were to write about the few things I do know anything about, the reader would be much worse off indeed, but still, writing about this idea of "grassroots" is going to be a stretch for yours truly. It's a political term, and it has to do with politics at a local or personal level, as opposed to politics as we often think about it—in centers of power and conducted by powerful people and interests. I think right about here is where I start to clue into why Libby thinks it is a good idea to cover this subject in this issue. We need to talk about grassroots politics because it is truly the only kind in which we component manufacturers, by and large, can participate.

In my seven years of being involved with WTCA, I have met smart people, rich people, creative people, successful people, funny people, helpful people, and a lot of wonderful people. I'm going to be frank with you; however, I haven't met any powerful people. Let's be honest with ourselves. We don't have any. As wonderful and rewarding as it is, being president, executive director, or anything else of WTCA doesn't get your calls to the White House returned. The easy thing to do, having faced that realization, is to throw in the towel and leave the politicking to the Powerful People, of whom we don't know any. We stick to building our trusses and wall panels, and flow along with the course of political events that we can't control or influence. The alternative is to believe in the power of grassroots politics, which is to say, believe in one's ability to have an influence over the course of political events by the simple act of getting involved in some way, and establishing a person-to-person relationship with an honest-to-goodness Powerful Person, such as a U.S. congressional representative.

I wish I could tell you a story that concludes with a "David and Goliath" sort of ending. One in which one individual took on well-funded special interest groups and defeated their selfish and ruinous intentions by standing up, forcing his or her way into the halls of power, and winning a brutal battle. I'd like that, but I don't personally know any stories like that, and the ones I do know, actually happened in movies that you have probably already seen.

Nonetheless, I'm going to relate to you a story of which I do have first-hand knowledge. For the last three years I have visited Washington, DC as part of our annual "a bunch of truss guys and gals go to Washington" effort (aka SBC's Legislative Conference, see page 23 for details). In each of those three years, WTCA staff has done an outstanding job making the process very easy for me. Lining up appointments with my congressman and both Senators' offices and preparing me with materials that outlined how some of the important issues then in front of decision-makers affect component manufacturers. Some examples are softwood lumber trade negotiations, tort reform and OSHA regulations. In each of those three years, I met with one of my actual Senators, and a staff member in the other two offices. My Congressman, Butch Otter (does that sound like an Idaho name or what?!) was unable to meet—quite possibly as the primary issue I wished to address related to fair trade, which is before the Senate for consideration as opposed to the House. I was able to meet with the same really nice (read unfail-

at a glance

- ☐ Our industry does not have any "Powerful People," but we can make a difference in our industry by meeting with our legislators locally. We do not need to be powerful to make a difference.
- ☐ Like the grassroots in your lawn, component manufacturers are many and mostly small, but in aggregate, our influence can be powerful.

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ingly polite) staff member all three years who attentively heard me out, and duly noted my position on these important issues. I'm not going to lie to you—at the time this seemed to me like a waste of time, especially after strike three.

Last summer, a staff member from Congressman Otter's Boise office called me and asked if the Congressman could schedule a visit to our plant. This surprised and alarmed me! The guy who I couldn't reach by traveling all the way to Washington, DC was trying to schedule a tour of my plant and a meeting to discuss my issues. We set a date, Congressman Otter came out and we spoke at length. I learned that he has background in wood products manufacturing, we exchanged views, and here is the part where I think getting involved in this "grassroots" political effort started to make a difference. One of the issues I brought up as important to our company is immigration law. I came to learn in that meeting that Mr. Otter is staunchly opposed to any sort of loosening of immigration policies. For my plant, and for many of yours I suspect, this is an important issue because we simply can't fill all of our jobs without hiring workers who were born in Mexico and other Latin American countries. The sort of position advocated by Mr. Otter could, if taken literally and acted upon literally, dramatically harm our ability to produce our products.

So here I am, finding out in my office that I am diametrically opposed to my Congressman on this issue. This is where we get to the part where I was surprised and glad I had gone to the effort of creating an opportunity to meet Mr. Otter. We had a frank discussion about the ramifications of both our positions, and I truly believe that the very business-friendly Congressman Otter developed an appreciation for my position, and I believe he started to understand how the undiluted version of his position could adversely impact the local economy in his district. We talked about some alternatives and possible compromises, I gave him and his assistant Idaho Truss coffee cups (it's not like I'm a lobbyist or something!), and we parted on excellent terms.

Now, I know that it is his job to part with everyone on good terms. He's a politician, and that's what he does. But we went through several issues in some detail that day, and we didn't agree on all of them, and sometimes we just had to agree to disagree. But when we went over immigration policies I believe that he learned something about my business and many others that he didn't know before, and in the end that could make a difference. I also believe that I established myself as someone with information, and created a link that I can use to contact Mr. Otter in the future.

I think the reason that they call it "grassroots" is because in your lawn, the roots of the grass are very many and very small, and are starkly contrasted against the roots of say, your trees, which are much larger and stronger. Like the grassroots in your lawn, we component manufacturers are many and mostly small. But, if each of us had an opportunity to meet personally, exchange information and become acquainted with our political representatives, those connections could aggregate into a lot of ability to influence the course of some future political event. That influence, in turn, could have a huge impact on the futures of all of our companies. **SBC**



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