Standing Up to Mother Nature

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Collective Efforts Support Stability and Growth of U.S. Building Industries

ANDREW CARNEGIE once said that "the ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives" is the "fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results." This spring more than 500 professionals from the roofing and insulation industries brought their individual efforts together in unified support for policies that promote the continued vitality of our nation's building and construction efforts by participating in organized visits with Congressional representatives in Washington, D.C.

In April, amid the profusion of cherry blossoms around the Tidal Basin, groups of roofing contractors, frontline workers, state and regional roofing associations, roofing manufacturers, distributors, and design- and roof-consulting professionals participated in close to 300 Congressional meetings as part of the industry's annual Roofing Day events. They were followed in May by contractors, manufacturers, and suppliers from the insulation industry representing the majority of states undertaking more than 100 meetings on Capitol Hill with lawmakers.

ROOFING DAY

Roofing Day in D.C. 2019 offered an opportunity for the entire roofing industry to advocate in support of three key issues:
1. A robust buildings component for infrastructure legislation.
2. Immigration reform that meets the roofing industry's workforce needs.
3. Expanded workforce training incentives.

Investment in U.S. public infrastructure could be a robust catalyst for sustained economic growth while also helping to create jobs. Congress currently is considering comprehensive infrastructure legislation for transportation, water and energy infrastructure needs. This includes the Public Buildings Renewal Act of 2019, S. 932, cosponsored by Senator Todd Young (R-IN) and Senator Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), which would provide tax-exempt financing to the private sector via partnerships with the U.S. government to repair and maintain numerous federally owned buildings around the country. Roofing Day advocates noted that the average public school building is at least 40 years old and the current backlog of maintenance and capital projects represents an annual funding gap of $45 billion.

According to the first-quarter 2019 Commercial Construction Index from USG Corp. and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 70 percent of building contractors are missing project deadlines because of the skilled labor shortage. Roofing Day advocates discussed the need for a visa system, such as the system proposed in the Workforce for an...
Expanding Economy Act, that would support the hiring priorities of roofing and similar industries. This system would ensure employers undertake vigorous recruitment to hire U.S. workers first, and enable job creators to obtain the foreign-born workers needed to meet demand and grow their businesses.

INSULATION INDUSTRY NATIONAL POLICY CONFERENCE

In May, 110 contractors, manufacturers, and suppliers from the insulation industry representing the majority of states met on Capitol Hill with lawmakers to discuss issues and ideas for harnessing the resources of the insulation industry to tackle some of the country’s most pressing problems.

With the constant stream of news stories highlighting the human costs and economic consequences of a changing environment, momentum is growing behind solutions that can address these environmental challenges in ways that strengthen U.S. economic productivity and competitiveness. To that end, advocates worked to build enthusiasm for federal action on policies that optimize the energy efficiency of new and existing buildings. Raising standards for new residential, commercial, and industrial buildings and retrofitting older ones can lead to long-term savings through better building performance.

Increasing the energy efficiency of buildings is a practical way to help the environment, create jobs, and save money. Boosting energy efficiency alone can provide 40 percent of the necessary greenhouse gas emissions reductions.
buildings and the people who use them with added protection from severe weather events. In 2017 alone, there were $317 billion in losses from U.S. natural disasters, jump-starting discussions on creating more resilient buildings and communities. Optimizing insulation for an energy efficient building envelope improves performance post-disaster or during prolonged events like heat waves or extreme cold. And the investment would pay off — it’s estimated that designing buildings to the 2018 I-Codes would deliver a national benefit of $11 for every $1 invested.

Some legislative tools to promote these improvements include:

▪ Strengthening oversight of new rules for disaster preparedness and response.
▪ Supporting investments in building science research.
▪ Recognizing buildings as infrastructure, including critical structures such as hospitals and schools.

Our environment is a constructed one — roads, buildings, offices, schools, houses and hospitals are all part of the infrastructure that sustains a productive economy. The strength of the construction industry is interwoven with the success of society overall. In tough economic times, companies retrench, grinding construction projects to a halt and leaving builders in a difficult position. This slowdown has a ripple effect through related industries, as architects, building suppliers, electricians, engineers, and retailers, feel the pinch from halted projects. As tax revenues fall, governments delay infrastructure investments and defer maintenance, using stopgap measures to keep things running without fixing underlying problems or proactively planning the replacement of systems already beyond their life expectancy.

A proactive approach to strengthen the construction industry does more than give a hand to hammer wielders and mortar spreaders. It provides stability that flows through the economy as projects move forward and the web of interconnected industries support each other in providing necessary services. Policies that support a robust building industry boost economic growth, improve energy security and independence, and advance U.S. global competitiveness.

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