

AWFS Members Call on Legislators in D.C. to Support Career Technical Education, Industry-Affecting Legislation

Members of the AWFS Public Policy Committee and two staff called on the offices of 16 legislators in Washington on September 15, to encourage support for Career Technical Education (CTE), federal formaldehyde legislation that is in sync with the California Air Resources Board and balanced decision making related to Combustible Dust.



AWFS members Rob Howell (L) and Kent Pitcher (R) and staff member Nancy Fister, meet with Representative Glenn Thompson (R-PA), Chair of the House caucus on Career Technical Education.

Of key importance to sustaining support for skilled trades in public schools is the Perkins Modernization Act, which would update long-standing legislation that has been the backbone of CTE across the country. The group called on the chairpersons of the CTE caucuses in the House and the Senate -- the offices of Senators Rob Portman and Tim Kaine, and Representative Glenn Thompson with whom the group met personally. Coming from the woods-heavy state of Pennsylvania, Thompson understands the importance of forest-based businesses to the economy and the need for well-trained people to assure the health of this sector. Through their office, we learned of a potential opportunity to participate in a CTE briefing related to wood products manufacturing.

Prior to visiting Washington, AWFS, joined by six other industry associations, sent a letter of support to Representative Joe Kennedy, sponsor of HR 1447, the Perkins Modernization Act, to express industry support. Those associations included Architectural

Woodwork Institute (AWI), North American Building Materials Distribution Association (NBMDA), Wood Components Manufacturers Association (WCMA), Wood Products Manufacturers Association (WPMA), Woodworking Machinery Industry Association (WMIA) and Woodworking Machinery Manufacturers Association (WMMA).

Other CTE legislation capturing the attention of Congress currently is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which is a re-write of the No Child Left Behind Act. Various groups are advocating for amendments that address CTE needs. AWFS, again with co-signers from other trade organizations, is delivering a letter of support for this CTE-friendly legislation as well.

AWFS has chosen to make CTE a priority talking point with legislators because of the critical shortage of skilled workers coming into the industry. This is a key moment for involvement as many legislators are hearing and seeing the negative impact to their state's economies and businesses due to this worker crisis.

Members carried the message that support of CTE was critical to small and medium-sized businesses as well as larger entities. While the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) is a strong education advocacy group that works in Washington on behalf of CTE, AWFS is bringing the voice of industry to the table to reinforce the message of the need for skilled workers.

Members also asked that any federal regulation regarding formaldehyde adopt the strict CARB regulations already in place rather than requiring additional third party testing and approval that risks hurting smaller companies. While OSHA has not yet moved for more stringent regulations regarding Combustible Dust, members expressed concerns that the wood products industry, particularly smaller companies, not be unduly encumbered by upcoming rulings.