

USIFI 2010 Lobby Days Draws Attention to Technical Textile Industry



Left to right: Kathy Mattson, IFAI, Dan LaPre, AMTAC, Ruth Stephens, USIFI, Senator Kay Hagan, North Carolina, Justin Barnett, Highland Industries, Brian Minor, Performance Fibers, Jane Johnson, Unifi

Twenty-eight United States Industrial Fabrics Institute (USIFI) members and Industrial Fabrics Association International (IFAI) staff attended this year's event, visiting Washington DC the same day as the Geosynthetic Materials Association (GMA) from IFAI was on Capitol Hill. This year's Lobby event was deemed effective by USIFI members who were often recognized by staff and Legislators from past visits. The consensus was that those offices where visits had occurred before are becoming savvy about technical textiles; those offices with less contact with the technical textile industry still view textiles as clothing and are surprised that there is a viable, competitive textiles industry remaining in the U.S.

The 2010 USIFI message in all offices was that Berry Amendment compliance and Buy America provisions mean jobs for U.S. citizens and U.S. trade needs to be fair. On the Berry issue, the military shelter supply chain is pursuing a change in interpretation of the Amendment by the Department of Defense to include tent components in the domestic requirement in addition to the tent fabric. This action is similar to that of the military uniform industry which successfully changed the Berry Amendment in 2006 to specify that uniform components also must be domestically produced. USIFI member company Easton Technical Products asked their Representative Ron Bishop, on the House Armed Services Committee, to add tent components language to the Defense Appropriations bill. (Berry Amendment is codified and changes are made through the Appropriations Bill.) They were also successful at getting their Senator Bennett to write to DLA to ask for a change in interpretation of Berry so that all parts of tents fall under Berry, not just the fabric.

On the trade issue, USIFI companies are asking Congress to support legislation which creates global fair-play. For example, H.R. 3012, H.R. 2378 and S. 1027, bills which address trade and currency issues, were brought to the attention of all offices, and Members were asked to support this legislation. In addition, each House office was asked to co-sign a letter from Congress to be sent to U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, addressing the need for immediate action in response to China's currency manipulation. While individual companies may not be able to affect change, as an industry USIFI members can show that this hurts domestic ability to compete in a global market where some of the countries are not abiding by

rules they agreed to follow when they joined the World Trade Organization. The U.S. technical textiles producers also believe that the Free Trade agreement written between the U.S. and Korea, but not yet ratified by Congress, is not in the best interest of U.S. companies. Therefore, each office was also asked to vote no on the KORUS FTA if it is brought for a vote in the 111th Congress.

In addition to Hill visits in 43 offices, USIFI members also met individually with Ms. Gail Strickler from the U.S. Trade Representative's Office and with Ms. Kim Glas of OTEXA in the Department of Commerce. Both officials are familiar with textiles issues and will carry the industry's message of fair trade and competition to the Administration. Both will also present at Outlook Conference in late April at Pinehurst, NC. (http://www.usifi.com/pdf/10Outlook_BroLR.pdf).

If you are interested in working on governmental affairs and are a company with manufacturing facilities in the U.S., USIFI is the special interest group of IFAI that will serve you well. Throughout the year, the division offers many ways to influence legislation for the good of the U.S. textile industry.