

Representing The Wiping Materials, Recycled Clothing, New Textile By Products and Fiber Industries

In My Opinion



Government Relations for the Little Guy

By Bill Schapiro, Whitehouse & Schapiro, Baltimore, MD

SMART Immediate Past President

My December column described how the respected Georgetown University economist Pietra

Rivoli has extolled our industry as an exemplary “global industry for the little guy” which succeeds “without the walls that protect their peers in many other industries.” How then, does the Association that represents our remarkable industry pursue our government relations without the benefit of the millions of dollars that fund the lobbying campaigns of other, more powerful industries?

The answer to that question is that SMART has a plan that is creative, efficient and imaginative. We are very fortunate to have Jessica Franken as our government relations consultant, and when asked to design a program to advance our strategic government affairs priorities on the limited budget that a 200 member, “little guy” association can afford, Jessica came through with flying colors!

A key feature of the plan is to launch “a proactive educational campaign designed to raise awareness about the industry among members of Congress” by initiating “a targeted outreach aimed at Congressional offices with whom SMART members have a constituent relationship.” Jessica plans to arrange monthly, a day of Capitol Hill meetings which would involve meetings with 8-10 offices for 15-20 minutes introducing SMART, the industry,

and our green recycling role. Jessica used a similar framework for INDA (the nonwovens industry association) and made contact with literally 100s of Congressional lawmakers and “greatly increased INDA’s visibility in Washington.” The benefit of this kind of proactive effort,” says Jessica, is that it “raises the awareness and will enable SMART to establish useful relationships with Congressional offices.”

Jessica will also be monitoring the Federal Register and other policy publications and inform SMART’s government relations committee when appropriate so that we can respond to issues that could effect our industry.

SMART is very fortunate that Jessica already participates in the EPA Wiper Rule on behalf of INDA and will continue to act as SMART liaison in cooperation with SMART Vice President Larry Groipen who has championed this cause for over 20 years. As far as making advances on the Customs issue, Jessica mentions that this will require “a grassroots advocacy effort leveraging our members’ constituent relationships with their elected officials” and we will have to determine if members are prepared to commit to getting involved. But it should be noted that our Congressional outreach program described above could increase the chances that someone in government will champion our cause.

I have often said that if SMART was only about government affairs alone, I would happily pay my dues and expect nothing more. Raising awareness of the positive economic role we play as recyclers will allow us to benefit considerably from increased government attention to environmental issues. We are the “the little guy” but thanks to our excellent trade association and its relationship with Jessica Franken, we have an outstanding program of which we can all be proud.