

More Than Ever, Government Advocacy Matters

By Tom DiGangi, Jr., Executive Director

“We no longer rely on the presence of others to arrange meetings with public agencies, solve contract problems, or testify before the Legislature. We do it ourselves, and we do it effectively.”

Years ago, industry-specific associations like the Associated General Contractors of New Jersey came to rely on other broad-based business and industry groups to be their advocates. Lobbying was in its infancy, comprised mainly of smoke-filled backroom dealing. Over time, lobbying has changed. It has grown heavily regulated, and practitioners of advocacy have developed skills – many through formal higher education and public service experience, not just a good relationship with a government official. As these changes took shape, the construction community adapted, bringing into the fold people with expertise to be their advocates. Today, AGC of NJ has several registered lobbyists, and combined with our partners at the Building Contractors Association of New Jersey, has the most formidable construction industry advocacy team in New Jersey.

We no longer rely on the presence of others to arrange meetings with public agencies, solve contract problems, or testify before the Legislature. We do it ourselves, and we do it effectively. In many cases the interests of union contractors no longer align with certain traditional advocacy groups. We must, and do, speak for who we represent – union contractors.

It is not just the management side of the industry that has adapted. Our labor partners have also re-tooled to develop a more sophisticated government advocacy program supported by experienced staff. When we join together on issues, elected and appointed government officials take notice. We are able to fight off many bad bills and rules, and win some proactive successes, but not always. The fight for more dedicated infrastructure funding is a case in point. Even collectively, business and labor advocates have been unable to sway government officials to increase user fees as much as is necessary. This is why we must continue to grow our presence.



AGC of NJ Executive Director Tom DiGangi, Jr. (R) speaks with Congressman Frank LoBiondo (L) about surface transportation funding in the halls of Congress.

Supporting the AGC of NJ Political Action Committee (PAC) is one of the most powerful ways members can help grow our presence. In New Jersey, there are political contests every year, and each of these candidates needs to hear what the collective membership of the Association thinks about the important issues of the day. Further, we need to help shape what is included among those important issues, such as long-term infrastructure funding, fairness in bidding, a predictable regulatory environment, and others. AGC of NJ PAC is how the Association engages in political discourse, and the PAC is dependent on your financial support.

Beyond political action, the Association needs to have clear and achievable goals to which the leadership will remain dedicated for many years. Advocacy takes time, and meaningful change takes more time. A long-term view of our goals is

important to success, and clarity about those goals is essential. It is this reason that the Association has adopted a series of big-picture public policy goals (*please see sidebar*).

These public policy goals help guide the Association leaders – both members and staff – to be consistent and effective advocates. They also help government decision-makers and decision-influencers gain a better understanding of what AGC of NJ represents. It is only through consistent messaging that AGC of NJ will continue to expand its influence on the government activity that directly impacts the bottom line of your business. For more detail about the AGC of NJ governmental agenda, please contact the Association office.

We have made great progress on many of these goals. Yet there is so much more to achieve on our “To Do” list. It is a list that keeps growing as you, our members, alert us to new injustices and inequities. We encourage you to keep in regular contact. Let AGC of NJ know about the problems you experience so the Association can help find solutions. Our forceful advocacy, professional staff, active membership and long-term political action will be crucial to our success.



AGC of NJ Public Policy Positions

Build for the Future - Support development, financial, energy-efficiency and tax initiatives that will jump-start privately funded construction, which will grow the economy and create jobs.

Enhance Competitiveness of Union Contractors – Oppose efforts to roll back the prevailing wage, and support enforcement efforts to ensure union contractors are competing on a level playing field.

Secure Funding Streams for New Jersey Transportation Trust Fund - Promote long-term funding solutions, supported by users, which will increase investment and improve the safety and efficiency of New Jersey’s transportation system.

Build Up Transportation Infrastructure - Invest in our State’s transportation infrastructure to ensure a thriving economy, including aviation, bridge, harbor, highway, port, rail, transit and tunnel.

Improve Water Infrastructure - Protect property and the health of our residents through investment in our State’s water resources.

Help Environmental Recovery and Limit Climate Change - Promote reasonable and achievable climate change policies and environmental reform.

Advance Consistency, Efficiency and Fairness in Agencies Procuring Construction Services – Promote policies that make rules clear and consistent across government agencies, increase bidding, ensure fair performance evaluations and claim resolutions, streamline project delivery, and enhance certainty regarding payment.

Increase Cooperation with Regulatory Agencies – Work with regulatory agencies and authorities to promote compliance with important laws and rules while ensuring that projects are delivered in a timely manner.

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