

Q & A With Pat O'Connor of IWLA's Government Affairs

Pat O'Connor is IWLA's Washington, DC representative. Pat is president of Kent & O'Connor, a Washington-based government affairs firm providing services to companies and national trade associations. Pat's main duties include lobbying industry issues before the United States Congress and regulatory agencies. Pat is well established in many areas, including commerce, transportation and the environment. During the course of the last year, Pat has worked with IWLA members on a variety of issues, including inventory tax legislation, food security regulations, hazardous materials, and customs and trade issues. We recently asked Pat about his government affairs role with IWLA.

Q - Please give us an overview of the services and lobbying that you provide IWLA.

A - I am IWLA's "eyes and ears" in Washington, DC. Our services include advocacy - representing the industry's perspective on legislation and regulations - and monitoring - following Congress and the federal agencies so that IWLA stays informed of new bills and regulations. As part of advocacy and monitoring, we work closely with IWLA's leadership to develop strategies for influencing public policy. We also serve as an information resource to IWLA members. We are available to members to answer questions, track down information and guide them through the maze that is the federal bureaucracy.

Q - Describe the kinds of issues about which IWLA members usually call you.

A - Typically, IWLA members approach us to find out what's involved in becoming a customs-bonded warehouse, where they can get information on training their employees how to handle hazardous materials, whether C-TPAT is now open to 3PLs, and whether certain states tax inventories held in a public warehouse.

Q - How long have you been IWLA's "boots on the ground" in Washington, DC?

A - I have had the honor and pleasure of working with IWLA since the 1980's.

Q - What are some of the other associations with whom you currently work?

A - We primarily represent trade and professional organizations. Our current clients include such diverse groups as the National Custom Brokers and Freight Forwarders Association, the National Association of Fleet Administrators, the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, and the American Supply Association.

Q - What is it that you most enjoy about working with IWLA members?

A - They are smart, honest, and very savvy business owners. They understand the political process and do not hesitate to get involved.

Q - What are some of the main accomplishments that IWLA government affairs have made over the last few years?

A - There have been several successes that include repealing the service tax in Michigan, amending the federal consumer product safety legislation to exempt 3PLs, taking a lead to block the Card Check legislation, and bringing rail demurrage to the

attention of the Congress and the STB. IWLA's major accomplishment, in my opinion, has been its ability to bring a high level of intellectual rigor and knowledge to its government affairs program. This has made IWLA a respected voice in Washington, DC.

Q - What do IWLA members need to be watching for on Capitol Hill as we move into 2010?

A - At the federal level, it will be legislation to further impose controls on the supply chain, whether international trade, food products, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, etc. It is important to keep in mind that when Congress acts, it is often oblivious to the Uniform Commercial Code. Another issue at the federal level will be further efforts to legislate on behalf of organized labor. Card Check is just the first of what we should expect to see over the next few years. At the state level, it will be efforts to tax warehouse and logistics services, including inventory taxes. In just the last year, we have had to fight back a warehouse tax in Carson, CA, and a dock door tax in Fife, WA.