

ABC Members Set Their Sights on the Texas Capitol

By Meghan Stephens, Assistant Editor



Every other year, members of Associated Builders and Contractors from across Texas join together for ABC Legislative Day and journey to the State Capitol. ABC members speak with Texas legislators about issues that are relevant to the construction industry as part of an organized effort to promote the ABC agenda to the State lawmakers. ABC Legislative Day is an all-day event that gives constituents a rare opportunity to discuss political concerns face-to-face with decision-makers in an eye-opening experience that impacts the governing process. This year, the ABC Legislative Day will be held on Tuesday, February 3rd, with a pre-event reception on Monday, February 2nd. All ABC members are encouraged to attend. The following article discusses what you can expect and will experience as an ABC Legislative Day participant.

Grouped into small teams by chapter, participants will spend the day delivering small boxes of chocolate with the ABC of Texas logo and educating legislators on the ABC Agenda. The ABC agenda includes hot-button issues such as Immigration, Contractor Licensing and Workers' Compensation. "These visits allow Legislators to realize the passion that ABC members have for the issues at hand, and the potential effects that the passage of a bill could have on our industry. Elected officials give far more weight to a group of people who make a trip to raise their voices, and this process gets their attention," says Bob Parker, longtime ABC of Texas Board member and Chairman of the Legislative Day Committee. Legislative Day attendees visit legislators from across Texas, even those without ABC Chapters in the area, and cultivate lasting relationships with both State lawmakers and other ABC members. "You don't need to know anything about politics to participate in this event. You can choose to talk, or simply listen and learn," says Parker. "Legislative Day is a valuable educational experience that supports the ABC cause. The more members that

participate, the greater our impact."

Legislative Day events begin with an open-house networking reception on the evening of February 2nd, held at the Offices of the Texas Lobby Group on Congress Avenue. All State lawmakers will be invited. After breakfast the following morning, a briefing

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session will be held prior to ABC members going to the Capitol to deliver the ABC chocolate and briefing materials. This session covers the agenda for the day, including an explanation of ABC of Texas' priority issues and how to effectively deliver the ABC message. "An important thing to remember is that the lawmakers are normal folks with businesses like ours. They have a day-to-day income just like everybody else, and they want people to know that they are here to help and willing to listen. This is a great opportunity to get to know these men and women on a personal level, while sharing an understanding of what issues are important," says Wes Johnson of The Gardner Law Firm, a returning participant in ABC Legislative Day. The interaction between ABC members and lawmakers promotes awareness of ABC of Texas

issues, which benefits ABC's goals when fighting to keep specific issues in check. Tony Rader of AUI Contractors encourages first-time participants to "shadow" a more experienced Legislative Day veteran in order to gain familiarity with the process and build confidence in the experience as the day goes on. "Networking with the other companies that participate is a huge plus. Interacting with industry professionals outside of the office and having partners with the same vision allows for lasting relationships to be built that will continue to grow," says Rader.

"Overall, it's an educational experience," says Russell Hamley, President of the Greater Houston Chapter. "Lobbying is not pushing someone into a corner, it's educating them on the benefits and consequences of each piece of legislation. If you've never seen the political process live, you won't understand it until you witness it firsthand. It is a positive experience that not only benefits our industry and our companies, but it benefits each individual who takes part."

All ABC members are invited to attend the 2009 Legislative Day event-attendance is free. However, it is critical for ABC to know who is attending in order to prepare nametags for the reception and provide an accurate count for breakfast. To attend and learn more about the event, please contact your local chapter. We look forward to seeing you at the 2009 ABC Legislative Day event!

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