

OUTSIDE the Beltway

Written by Dave Kirby

SIIA Members Learn Practice Pays in Effective Government Relations

During college basketball's "March Madness" tournaments success usually rewards the teams whose performance is peaking during the final days of the season. That usually means the teams that have continued to improve through their grueling schedule, applying the benefits of their game experience and practice sessions.

A similar process could apply to many endeavors that don't require sneakers and baggy shorts – things like cultivating good relations with government bodies whose decisions can affect one's business. Many SIIA members have sharpened their focus

on government processes and learned how to effectively advocate for favorable decisions about issues that affect self-insurance.

OKLAHOMA

"We are seeing a notable improvement in members' abilities to conduct grassroots advocacy, particularly in states that are grappling with issues such as stop-loss insurance, which is an absolute necessity to many employer-sponsored benefit plans," said **Adam Brackemyre**, Vice President of State Government Relations in SIIA's Washington, DC, office.

"In some instances we're getting spontaneous reports of emerging state issues along with members' contacts with their involved elected officials," Adam noted. "This means to us that members' continuing efforts in government relations are making them more effective advocates."

One recent example was that of an Oklahoma bill which appeared to lower the minimum aggregate attachment point of stop-loss policies from the current 120% to 110% of expected claims. That puzzled many observers because it would run counter to the usual attempt by some states to raise minimum attachment points.

SIIA's State Legislative/Regulatory News bulletin of February 1, reported the introduction of that bill to members. Some members responded immediately with their intentions to follow up on the bill just two days later a member passed along a report citing a responsible regulatory staff member to say that the phrase about aggregate stop-loss attachment points was a drafting error and would be addressed.

"This quick response initiated by a SIIA member was indicative of a smoother, more effective government relations process," Brackemyre said. "It gave us confidence that our members



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are following the advice to make friends in government before we need them."

One SIIA member who followed up on the stop-loss bill was **Barry Koonce** in American Fidelity's Oklahoma City office. He said that government relations involvement activities are an ongoing practice in his company.

"We feel we have good relations with the Oklahoma House and Senate as well as the Insurance Commissioner's office," Koonce told *The Self-Insurer*. "We have taken time to get to know the key people and we feel we can have a dialogue with them about important issues."

"In our state it appears that the legislators, regulators and industry all work together on the objectives of protecting consumers and maintaining a fair and business friendly environment. As a result, we enjoy a degree of market freedom that serves the economy and taxpayers," he added.

Oklahoma is just one current example of the stop-loss industry's ability to effectively advocate for its interests. "Over time we have been gratified to see improved government outreach among SIIA members in many states," Brackemyre said. ■

SIIA members who wish to join the state government relations team are invited to contact Adam Brackemyre at the Washington, DC, office, (202) 463-8161 or abrackemyre@sii.org.

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