

Legislative News

National Policy Seminar Report

by Russell Plaschka, KAAE Legislative Chair

Greetings from southeast Kansas. It is springtime, the flowers are blooming, and the legislative process is in full swing. Kent Blessing and I had a great experience in DC March 5-7 from the very informative breakout sessions with ACTE and some of the legislative staffers to our productive meetings with our congressmen.

We were able to meet with every office while in DC. Our meetings went as follows:

- Representative Boyda- Met with her staffer Amanda Cott. She was very impressed with the fact sheets from the state department and was "sold" on the idea that career and technical education can be and is a major impact in the NCBL act. Very supportive of CTE and CTSO.
- Representative Tiaht- Met with Amy Skeen. Also very supportive and knew of the impact we make.
- Representative Moore- Met with Adam Miles. Also knew of our impact, but I had the feeling that he wanted more of exactly how we impact outcomes of NCBL.
- Representative Moran- I was able to meet one-on-one with Jerry for twenty minutes. He was extremely supportive of CTE. Those of you who know him already know he is a supporter of our programs. He agreed that NCBL is a flawed plan that he intends to make changes on. If we have a champion in DC, it is Jerry.
- Senator Brownback- Met with LaRochelle Young. She has been with the senator for ten years, and Kent and I met with her individually so she got a double dose on the same day. She was very supportive and was surprised at the number of CTE programs throughout the state and where some are located. Her father and brothers were both in a CTSO, so she knew the benefits but did not know how we have evolved over the years.
- Senator Roberts- Met with Ashley McMillan. Again very supportive and knows a lot of people that were in CTE programs. She understands the need for our programs.

As a whole, the main theme was that they need hard facts and numbers to give to the Congressmen. We need to get those numbers i.e. graduation rates, number of students that score proficient, drop out rates, post secondary diplomas or certificates. If we can show them with numbers how we really affect our schools, we will really get their attention. Secondly, we need to be accessible, call or write with those success stories and invite them to your functions. They may not come at all but they might just one time, and you need to be ready to show them the very best of what you do.

While waiting on a two-hour plane delay in the airport, I had the opportunity to visit with State Senator Peggy Palmer from Augusta and Rep. Judy Morrison from Shawnee. These ladies knew of us only from the barrage of phone calls and e-mails last year and the year before, and they were not impressed. What they want is the information needed to make informed decisions i.e. numbers. After two hours with them, they have quite a different view of our business. We need to continue to cultivate those relationships. I cannot stress enough the importance of finding and getting to know you congressmen on both the state and national level. They want to hear from us, and they will listen if we are not screaming at the last hour trying to save our funding. We have to be proactive in our advocacy efforts. Please, next time your congressmen is in your area, go meet them and just talk with them about what you do in your school and community. Good luck and thank you for the great experience.