

Longview News-Journal

Longview Chamber flies to D.C. to talk policy



By Ken Hedler
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Federal transportation funding, a new education law, regulations of ozone levels and other issues were on the agenda when a 10-member delegation from the Longview Chamber of Commerce visited Washington, D.C., this past week.

Delegation member Staci Killingsworth, a Longview attorney making her first trip to Washington, D.C., said she learned more about gasoline taxes, the ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) successor to No Child Left Behind and Environmental Protection Agency regulations regarding ozone.

Attendees discussed legislation that can affect their communities, said Killingsworth, who works for the law firm of Linebarger Goggan Blair & Sampson LLP.

Killingsworth and the other delegates for the D.C. Fly-In met with U.S. Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, U.S. Rep. Louie Gohmert, R-Tyler, and staff for U.S. Rep. Sam Houston, R-Plano, during the visit Wednesday and Thursday.

The delegates also met organizations in Washington that influence public policy, said Mike Northcutt, senior vice president and chairman of the Longview Region for Citizens National Bank. His wife, Carolyn, a retired math teacher, accompanied him on the fly-in, which takes place every other year in Washington when the Texas Legislature is not in session.

The purpose of the fly-in is to meet with elected officials and discuss issues that affect the business climate in East Texas, said Suzanne Brown, the chamber's advocacy and communications director. Chamber staff prepared the attendees by providing a packet with the agenda and policies the chamber supports and arranged for them to meet with representations from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and associations to be briefed on legislation.

The schedule was "jam-packed" with meetings, said Killingsworth, who, along with the other attendees, paid their own way.

"The chamber did a wonderful job putting this together," she said.

The trip taught the importance of meeting members of Congress on their own turf, Northcutt said.

"It is just exposure to our representatives," he said. "I think it is important for them to see us in Washington."

Northcutt, who said he attended a fly-in about 20 years ago with the chamber, said he had an opportunity to network not just with elected officials and others in Washington but with other attendees as well.

"I'm not active on the (chamber) board," Northcutt said. "I'm just a citizen and member of the chamber."

While the attendees spent a lot of time in meetings, Killingsworth, a Longview native, said she enjoyed some sightseeing as well. She visited Smithsonian museums and other attractions.

"I certainly enjoyed the trip," Killingsworth said. "It was very nice to see all of these historical sites in person, and it also was very informative to hear firsthand from individuals."

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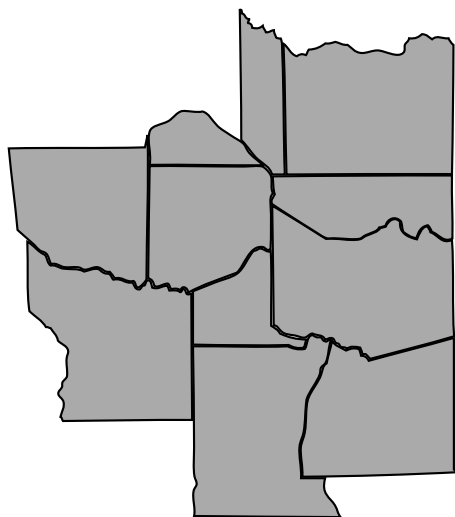
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