

The Legislative **ENGINEER**

**U.S. REP. BRUCE
WESTERMAN
OF ARKANSAS
DISCLOSES THE
ADVANTAGES OF
BRINGING AN
ENGINEERING
BACKGROUND
TO CONGRESS**

Congressman Bruce Westerman is currently serving his second term as an Arkansas representative, having first been elected in 2014. He is a member of the House Budget Committee, the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Committee on Natural Resources. He also is one of the few members of Congress who are licensed professional engineers. He was named Engineer of the Year in 2013 by the Arkansas Society of Professional Engineers.

In this exclusive interview with *Engineering Inc.*, Westerman discusses the prospects of an infrastructure bill, the economic implications of the new tax law and why his engineering background serves him well as a congressman.



ACEC: How has your training and experience as a professional engineer affected your role as a legislator?

Congressman Bruce Westerman: Engineering is a great background to have to serve in Congress because engineers are taught how to solve problems, be very analytical and take some of the emotion out of the decision and concentrate on the facts. That's where my engineering training has been invaluable for me while serving in Congress.

ACEC: Do you think having more engineers in Congress can make a difference on legislation such as transportation and energy?

Westerman: It should be a plus. One thing I've noticed about Congress is that if you have expertise on an issue that comes up, you generally get an opportunity to weigh in on that issue because your colleagues respect your expertise. We've had some issues in the past, and the fact my colleagues knew I had an engineering background added a little more weight to my perspective.

I believe we need more engineers in elected office across the board. I talk to a lot of engineering groups and to engineering students, and I always encourage them to get involved in politics, whether they are going to run for office or not. The fact is the laws and rules propagated by those in elected office can have a lot of impact on engineering careers and what happens with the economy. It's just important that engineers become more involved. I don't know the exact number of engineers currently in Congress, but I do know there are two engineers who were just elected by special elections—Ron Estes, R-Kansas, and Greg Gianforte, R-Montana.

ACEC: What is the stretch from being trained as an engineer to going into public policy?

Westerman: For me it was simply taking the opportunity to get involved. The first office I ever ran for was the local school board. My engineering background worked well for me there because they were looking at a construction project and had to deal with a lot of things that come naturally to engineers—managing projects, understanding how projects flow—things that were second nature to me but a void to the rest of the board as well as the administration. I had no ambitions of serving in Congress when I ran for the school board, but from there I went to the state legislature and then to Congress.

ACEC: Do you have suggestions for engineers who are interested in getting more involved in politics, policy and legislation?

Westerman: Whether it's a volunteer position such as serving on a school board, city council, county government or one of the volunteer organizations, there are always places engineers can get involved. I believe that anywhere an engineer chooses to become involved, they will find that their background and expertise are needed. Our church was hit by a tornado and since I'm a deacon of the church, and an engineer, they made me chairman of the rebuilding project.

As engineers we have things we can share that will benefit other people although that's not something we always realize. But it takes being active and getting involved, something engineers should do more.

One thing my office has done on getting more engineers interested in public policy has been to start an engineering internship program. We're doing that with the Association of Engineering Deans. John English, dean of the University of Arkansas College of Engineering, created a program to provide scholarships for students to come to Capitol Hill in the summer to intern in my office as well as with the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. North Carolina State has a similar program. It would be great to see those kinds of programs expanded.

ACEC: What is your prognosis for whether we're going to get an infrastructure bill, and what do you think some of the dimensions of that bill might be?

Westerman: I have yet to meet anybody in Congress, or anybody in the administration, who doesn't want to see an infrastructure bill. People recognize the need for infrastructure. It's not something that's politically motivated. You can see the deterioration of the roads, inland waterways and airports. There's a huge demand for rural broadband, which particularly affects my district.

We know the infrastructure needs are there, the problem is how do you fund it. I know it's one of the top priorities of the administration. We've already talked about it in the House Republican Conference. The big priority starting off 2018 is what we do with the infrastructure package. As a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, I hope to bring some new ideas on how we fund infrastructure.

There's talk about public-private partnerships, and that works great in urban areas with a lot of use demand. But in rural areas, such as my district, you probably won't get too many public-private partnerships. We have an infrastructure funding formula that's not relevant anymore, and when it was first put in place, there were things you could not foresee in the future, such as increased miles per gallon on vehicles and electric vehicles. We have a lot of vehicles on the road that are paying zero to use that infrastructure.

While we generally think of infrastructure as roads, we must also consider our inland waterways, which are important in transporting so much of the nation's freight. An example is the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System in my district, which is in major need of repair. A tremendous amount of freight depends



GARY LANDSMAN

"I have yet to meet anybody in Congress, or anybody in the administration, who doesn't want to see an infrastructure bill."



Congressman Bruce Westerman (left) discusses industry priorities with ACEC President/CEO Dave Raymond (center) and ACEC Chairman Sergio "Satch" Pecori.

on that system, and while it may often be out of sight and out of mind, just let one of those gates on the lock and dam fail. You'll see an immediate influx of tractor-trailer rigs out on the interstate, putting more people's safety at risk and adding to the wear and tear of the infrastructure. Everybody in our country depends on our infrastructure system.

ACEC: Do you think Congress will take up a single infrastructure bill that covers a variety of infrastructure needs such as water, transportation and communications, or do you think it will be more segmented? Also, will the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) be included?

Westerman: As it stands now the goal is for a broad infrastructure plan. Whether WRDA will be included is still being decided. There are so many negotiations that have yet to take place. Most importantly, we need to figure out how to pay for it. I think high-speed broadband will also be in the plan, plus a lot of innovative ways to fund infrastructure. The key comes back to how much can we afford.

ACEC: As you know, Congress in late December cleared the first major tax reform bill in over 30 years. From your perspective, how will the new tax law help the economy and job growth going forward?

Westerman: I think we're already seeing an impact from the new tax law. We're seeing millions of employees getting bonuses from their employers as a result of the tax bill. We're seeing companies talk about billions of dollars of investment, and I believe that's only going to grow. The problem I see is that the economy will be growing so well that we'll need to do a better job of training people to fill any new jobs. We have 24 million able-bodied, working-age adults sitting on the sideline right now. We need to use federal

policy to motivate them even more to enter the job market. Having good jobs and a demand for labor is a key part of sustaining that economic growth. ■

Important news for Bentley® Users



- Prevent Quarterly and Monthly Overages
- Control all Bentley® usage, even licenses you do not own
- Give users visibility of who is using licenses now
- Warn and Terminate Idle usage

SofTrack controls Bentley® usage by Product ID code and counts (pipe, inlet, pond, and all others) and can actively block unwanted product usage

SofTrack reports and optionally controls usage of all Autodesk® products by Version, Feature Code, and Serial Number!

SofTrack reports and controls ESRI® ArcMap concurrent and single use license activity

CONTACT US NOW:

(866) 372 8991 (USA & Canada)

(512) 372 8991 (Worldwide)

www.softwaremetering.com

© 2017 Integrity Software, Inc. Bentley is a registered trademark of Bentley Systems, Incorporated

