



ON THE SIDE OF THE GOOD

Taking an Integrated and Innovative Approach to Government Relations. By Emily Walzer



David Costello wears many professional hats on a daily basis. Depending on the project he may don a cap as business executive, industry advocate, lobbyist, co-author of U.S. patents in the area of advanced materials, and/or active board member of the Appalachian Mountain Club, The Conservation Alliance and The Trustees of Reservations. We caught up with Costello recently to talk about his company Rising

Tide Associates, his non-profit organization the Warrior Protection and Readiness Coalition, and learn his views on made-in-America manufacturing. He brings 20 years of marketing and external affairs experience to his work developing federal, state and commercial business opportunities for corporate and non-profit clients. Here we ask Costello to elaborate on his expertise within the domestic textile and footwear industries and share his outlook for these markets in 2016 and beyond.

How is Rising Tide distinctly different from a traditional government relations practice?

Whereas others focus on one element, be it government or lobbying, Rising Tide offers a broad scope of experience and expertise. My background is in business and manufacturing, both in product and business development. We also bring to the table government relations, public relations, and strategic development experience and apply all this to a problem a client may have. We understand how to grow a business and truly believe in USA manufacturing. When I go into a plant I get excited. There is nothing more important than touching and feeling the product to help continue the innovation.

Can you share some examples of projects you're currently involved with?

We work with Vibram USA and also Wolverine Worldwide (which includes Saucony) in the footwear space. With them we are engaged in making a completely USA-made athletic shoe, something that has not been done in a very long time – like decades.

The Army issues a uniform kit that includes everything from towels, boots, socks, underwear to helmets, and everything in that kit, from the yarn forward, is 100 percent American made except for athletic shoes. The Department of Defense (DOD) got away from this in the early 2000s as footwear production went overseas.

We've been involved on the private development side to figure out how every stitch of components can be made domestically for three years, and even longer since the original concept. Because the DOD is slow to change, we had to advocate and lobby on the behalf of this change and worked with a broad spectrum of armed services committees in the Senate and the House of Representatives. People are shocked when they find out you can't get USA-made athletic shoes. We rolled all these factors together to get the policy changed and we figured out all the development. Saucony will do this in Big Rapids, MI where Wolverine has a 100-year legacy of building shoes. American warfighters will have American made athletic shoes within the next year or so, which will benefit them and benefit the U.S. makers. The added benefit is we can take these technologies and apply them to other types of footwear – to make a lighter weight combat boot, for example, and we really like that story.

What is your position on the Berry Amendment and why do you believe it is important to textiles as well as to other products?

The Berry Amendment came into place in 1941 to maintain the industrial base here and it's been the law of the land since. It helps to protect and maintain capabilities in textiles and allows innovation to flourish. We focus on expanding the application of the Berry Amendment because right now it only applies to the DOD and there are a number of companies that would not be in business without



David Costello
Rising Tide Associates

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Costello, visit
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the Berry Amendment. For example companies providing specialty items like combat armor made out of Kevlar. It's important so we are not dependent on unfriendly competitors making our products. You don't want to be dependent on China and/or Russia – both big producers for these kinds of things – for your ballistic vest for instance. That is probably not in the best interest of the United States.

Tell us about the recent passage of the U.S. Defense Act for FY 2016. What does it mean for domestic industries?

The National Defense Authorization Act is an annual Defense bill that has passed every year for the last 50 years. This is the one that must pass; it sets the policy and spending levels for the DOD for the fiscal year we are in. The other component is that there has been a lot of trouble in recent years with sequestration that occurred in the U.S. government – which never should have happened, but did, with the net effect of greatly reduced spending, in all agencies, including the DOD. Last year they passed a set two-year deal that relieves some of the pressure from sequestration. It made good governance better. We're now working on the FY17 bill that will fund the year that starts in government in October.

You co-founded the Warrior Protection and Readiness Coalition (WPRC) in 2009. How has the non-profit evolved?

Over the years we have developed great relationships within management of the Armed Services. Leadership was concerned how to be prepared in the future. So we got nine companies in the industry to advocate for thoughtful spending for basic funding for military programs to keep warfighters protected. Now there are 40 member WPRC companies, making everything from ballistic goggles, to helmets, to camo textiles for clothing, footwear, socks, et cetera. From big companies like Burlington Industries to tiny companies like Wild Things. At our recent legislative Summit we brought 50 company leaders to DC and we went to Capitol Hill and had 70 meetings in two days. We went before Congress and talked about how this industry can work together to provide jobs and sustain capabilities domestically.

What about the current political scene and the candidates' influence on defense budgeting in the next four years?

What will be great for our membership, and for our industry and for our country in general, is when this election is over! What happens at the presidential level will affect the down-ballot candidates, meaning the Senate and the House and that can cause change. Our job is to not only continue to work with people we know but work with new people and advance our mission to educate and advocate for the U.S. industries and make sure things are taken care of. ●