

Skanska Quits U.S. Chamber Over Anti-LEED Lobbying

Citing the Chamber's alliance with the chemical industry against LEED, Skanska resigns in protest.

By Paula Melton

International construction giant Skanska USA has terminated its membership in the U.S. Chamber of Commerce due to what the firm views as attempts to “halt progress in sustainable building.” The move reportedly came after failed talks with the U.S. Chamber about its policies, and it follows on the heels of a [pro-LEED op-ed in the Washington Post](#) penned by Michael McNally, president and CEO of Skanska USA.

At issue is the U.S. Chamber's membership in the [American High-Performance Building Coalition](#) (AHPBC), an advocacy group formed by the American Chemistry Council (ACC) and other trade organizations to support green building standards developed through the ANSI or ISO consensus process. Although AHPBC claims it does not favor one rating system over another, its emphasis on ANSI mirrors the Green Building Initiative's claims for its [Green Globes rating tool](#). Chemical and plastics companies [have objected to new credits in LEED v4](#) that will reward project teams for using alternative materials.

“A moral issue”

The U.S. Chamber is going against its own values by not supporting LEED, McNally argues. “I believe in a lot of what the U.S. Chamber does,” he explained. “They do a good job of representing business. I’m really disappointed in this position that they took.”

LEED has been a huge boon for the construction industry, he claims, offering “immediate paybacks” as well as long-term economic health due to lower healthcare and energy bills that make the U.S. “able to compete on a global basis.”

He adds, “We’re building these things that are lasting a hundred or more years, and we need to be responsible. It’s for me kind of a moral issue.”

Also a political issue

Skanska's timing reflects a sense of urgency about a forthcoming amendment to the popular [Shaheen-Portman energy bill](#)—an amendment that [could potentially prevent federal agencies from using LEED for its projects](#). “What I’m trying to do is raise awareness,” he explained. “The vast majority of businesses would be upset and outraged that this is going on, but they’re not aware of it. It’s one way to get the issue out in the open.”

ARTICLE CONTENTS

- [“A moral issue”](#)
- [Also a political issue](#)
- [Hiding behind consensus?](#)
- [What will this accomplish?](#)

DISCUSSIONS

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Jul 23, 2013



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“Once again this year, we are strong supporters of the Shaheen-Portman energy-efficiency bill,” Matt Letourneau, director of communications and media at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, told *EBN*. Letourneau declined to speculate about its support of specific amendments to the bill because “both the timing and the state of various amendments seem very much in flux right now.”

An AHPBC spokesperson made a similar statement but added, “I can reiterate that one of the coalition’s objectives is to advocate for green building standards that align with the coalition’s mission when considered for adoption by federal, state, and local governments.” Although multiple LEED credits reference ANSI standards, the overall rating system is not developed through the ANSI process. (It’s unclear whether the Green Globes rating tool is based on the Green Building Initiative’s ANSI standard, [ANSI/GBI 01–2010](#).)

Hiding behind consensus?

Trying to keep LEED out of the federal government just doesn’t make business sense, McNally says. “I don’t think it’s right for the industry to have a parallel system for the government. It adds bureaucracy, and it adds cost.”

But some trade groups counter that the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) has excluded their point of view from the process. Following the [successful passage of the new LEED v4 rating system](#), AHPBC [released a statement](#) criticizing USGBC for “disregarding the sustained, serious technical objections from important stakeholder groups”—namely, manufacturers of plastic foam insulation, PVC, manufactured wood products, and other building materials.

“We do not view our membership in the American High-Performance Buildings Coalition as inconsistent with our support of building efficiency, or even of LEED standards in the future,” notes Letourneau. “Rather, we believe it is constructive to have a dialogue regarding the criteria used in future green building standards. A consensus-based approach to stronger efficiency standards will ensure broader acceptance and implementation.”

McNally is having none of it.

“They hide behind words like ‘consensus,’ which is nonsense,” he said. “They know better.” McNally adds, “How could you ever have a standard like this and have 100% yesses? If you wind back the clock, we’d still have lead paint—because God forbid we push the lead-paint people out and not get consensus!”

What will this accomplish?

Skanska USA still supports the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, according to McNally, and is not encouraging others to resign. “The goal was the kill the [anti-LEED] amendment,” he said. “Success to me looks like the amendment doesn’t get attached, and the chemical industry and this coalition give up.”

With a tough fight over student loan reforms in its near future, it’s unclear when the Senate will take up the Shaheen-Portman bill and the many amendment proposals it has already attracted, but sources suggest it could be as early as July 15.

July 28, 2013

DISCUSSIONS

Reader-contributed comments related to *Skanska Quits U.S. Chamber Over Anti-LEED Lobbying - EBN: 22:8*. Comments are listed with newest at the top.

AHPBC writes op-ed in the Washington Post

Posted by Paula Melton on Jul 23, 2013, 09:52 PM

The op-ed asserts, “If Americans’ hard-earned tax dollars are to go toward implementing

LEED on the federal level, the Green Building Council, or the federal government, has a responsibility to ensure consensus, meaning that all materially affected stakeholders can participate in the development of the system, and that their technical input is fully considered. This unfortunately isn't happening."

Read more here: http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/capitalbusiness/commentary-more-voices-need-to-be-heard-when-setting-green-standards/2013/07/19/4fd8200a-ed63-11e2-9008-61e94a7ea20d_story.html

AHPBC releases statement about consensus

Posted by Paula Melton on Jul 11, 2013, 03:19 PM

We've just received word from the American High-Performance Buildings Coalition that they are trying to get consensus-related language attached to the federal budget.

"The House FY2014 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations bill includes the following language: 'none of the funds made available under this heading may be obligated or expended to implement or use green building rating standards for new construction or prospectus level renovations unless such standards are voluntary consensus standards, as that term is defined in Office of Management and Budget Circular A-119.'"

As we noted in our fact-checking blog post on chemical industry attacks on LEED, the U.S. General Services Administration has determined that LEED meets this definition of a consensus standard:

"The certification system contains the attributes of a voluntary consensus standards body defined in OMB Circular A-119: openness, balance of interest, due process, an appeal process, and consensus."

More to come on this developing story.

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