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Port Authority gets message across

Legislators updated on progress; members, officials talk about future

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NEWARK -- It took a trip to Washington, D.C., but local officials and members of the Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority are confident legislators got the message.

The day trip to the capital Wednesday gave the group a chance to thank legislators for their support, update them on The Base's progress and discuss future development, said Rick Platt, executive director of the port authority.

"What this came down to was you don't want to call on them only during a crisis," he said.

Platt, Licking County Commissioner Tim Bubb, Heath Mayor Dan Dupps, port authority member Fred Paul and representatives from Boeing Co., Bionetics Corp. and BAE Systems met with legislators, including U.S. Sen. George Voinovich, U.S. Rep. Pat Tiberi and U.S. Rep. Zack Space.

Platt said knew Voinovich and Tiberi were aware of the state of The Base, but he was surprised by how much Space knew about the facility, which also is known as the Central Ohio Aerospace and Technology Center.

He said Space understood how important The Base, which employs more than 900 people, is to the county's retention of its workforce.

Bubb said conversations turned to other community issues, particularly, improving the county's rail system.

"A lot of development in the Heath corridor is tied to rail access," he said.

Space keyed them into preliminary legislation that would ensure competitive rates in areas with single-source railway, Bubb said.

Dupps said he didn't come back with any leads on funding Heath's proposed water tower, but there is talk of putting it in an appropriations bill.

The \$1 million water tower would entice future businesses, especially an unnamed company that would bring about 450 jobs to the area if it decides to set up shop in Heath, he said.

Dupps said Paul reminded legislators the ArvinMeritor facility in Heath still had capabilities in the defense industry.

The plant produces axles for utility, military, emergency, coach and construction vehicles.

The facility's future is uncertain after the recent layoffs of 144 employees and the company's declining to say whether or not future layoffs will be required.

"Don't send those jobs to Utah," Dupps said. "Here is a corporation that puts out a good product and has a long history of putting out a good product."
