



POLITICS / GOVERNMENT / LEGISLATION

Small Profession - Big Impact?

WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE HIGHLY COMPETITIVE 2024 ELECTION RACES

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- In this political environment, with resources stretched by the political class, a small profession will be noticed by being involved to some degree.
- In this highly competitive atmosphere, more chiropractic organizations should consider endorsing candidates or, as in Iowa, encouraging their members to get involved in more than one candidate's race.
- Regardless of which party wins, each competitive race could come down to a single percent for the winner. Tight races give small associations leverage and opportunities.

How often have you heard the statement around presidential election time that *this* is the year the profession has the opportunity to impact the political processes, and the importance of doctor participation? I probably said that more than once when I was at the CCA and then the ACA.

This year, I am more convinced than ever about the opportunities to be involved not just in the presidential election, but also in congressional and local state campaigns. In this political environment, with resources stretched by the political class, a small profession will be noticed by being involved to some degree. Every vote will be significant at the party level or in a narrow third-party movement.

Chiropractic Advocacy in Action

Some events are already happening within chiropractic that will sensitize the profession to what might occur:

The Iowa Chiropractic Society started early by getting a commitment from its board to

communicate to its members and students the importance of involvement in the presidential caucus on Jan. 15. The state operates on a caucus voting system whereby its 1,100-plus caucus locations coincide with chiropractic offices throughout the state.

The ACA has succeeded in securing 158 members of Congress to cosponsor its Chiropractic Medicare Coverage Modernization Act, which would reimburse DCs for Medicare services within their practice's scope. It doesn't guarantee members' votes if it gets to the floor, but it is an essential step in the right direction, and there are reasons to be motivated. (For a list of current co-sponsors of the House legislation, visit www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/1610/cosponsors.)

Many national polls show New York and California, each with approximately five to eight congressional seats, as toss-ups and too close to call. These would be good targets for the profession to be involved in.

The California Chiropractic Association is looking closely at these congressional seats, four of which are in Orange County. Executive VP Dawn Benton and Dr. Lloyd Friesen are reaching out to CCA members to participate in these races, primarily if they are co-sponsors and have a history of support.

In this highly competitive atmosphere, more organizations should consider endorsing candidates or, as in Iowa, encouraging their members to get involved in more than one candidate's race.

This position isn't without controversy. I have heard that a few in the profession would rather stay neutral in a race for fear of offending the winner. But when it is time for their support, they will be more likely to remember the slight. If you don't want to support a particular individual, make sure your members spread out between the two candidates. An alternative is encouraging members to be involved in their candidate of choice.

Why Taking a Chance Matters

Let me share my experiences over the past 40 years in national and state politics, when taking a chance clearly had its benefits. The first and most significant was when the CCA PAC made a last-minute contribution of \$50K in support of a non-incumbent. This went against conventional wisdom when a small association didn't take chances; in this instance, the incumbent was related to a chiropractor.

Even worse, the party had ties to the profession. But we had to make a point to the Republican Party, which continually voted down an important piece of legislation while still taking our PAC contributions and claiming to be friendly to the profession. Our candidate defeated the incumbent by 300 votes, and one of the consequences was that the Democrats maintained control of the Assembly.

To add salt to the wound, we engaged the students at the two colleges to get involved in the campaign by doing basic grassroots activities. After we succeeded in the campaign, we heard complaints from Republicans about what we did. One "friendly member" carrying one of our bills looked me in the eye and said he knew we convinced the two colleges to close their campuses the weekend before this election so the students could work in the office or walk the precinct. I didn't dissuade him of his opinion, but I suspect no more than 15 students were involved. In politics, perception is reality.

I was in the dog house with Republicans for months, but they maintained the ties with our leadership. The attitude toward me changed when an orthopedic surgeon emerged as a candidate

for Assembly. His views on issues conflicted with those of the Republican leadership.

They asked us for help, we again came in with a last-minute contribution, and our guy won. Things changed overnight, and the Republican leadership became supporters to help with workers' comp legislation that was important to us.

We used this strategy in several Senate races when I joined the ACA. In the first race, we supported an incumbent senator who had been helpful to us. In addition to encouraging member participation in the race, we made a \$10,000 purchase of radio sport-time ads just two weeks before the election. Our candidate won by 300 votes.

Two years later, the majority leader, Senator Daschle from South Dakota, a strong supporter, was challenged by a popular Republican congressman who also had strong ties to the profession. We endorsed Daschle. Again, we made a last-minute contribution of \$10,000 using our former chairman with radio spots. Daschle lost, but the winner had substantial chiropractic support. Senator Thune is still in the Senate in a leadership position. The ideal situation is if you have two candidates with backing in the profession; then it's a win-win.

Sure, the profession or state association can do nothing or be minimally involved, but let's look again at the opportunities. Many tight races are expected in 2024. Regardless of which party wins, each competitive race could come down to a single percent for the winner. Tight races give small associations leverage and opportunities.

Editor's Note: The [first article](#) in this timely series on political advocacy by chiropractic, "Election-Year Advocacy: Time to Recharge," appeared in the December 2023 issue.

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