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The final countdown

Here it is: my last *Digger* column!

This year has gone by more quickly than I could have imagined it would. My best friend once told me that every year up until you are 21 just drags on, but after that, the rest fly by. The same is true for a president's one-year term of office at the Oregon Association of Nurseries. It seems like it takes forever to get here — and then it is over.

This year has been a full one. A vast majority of the time has been spent in the Government Relations realm. A plethora of activity at the state, federal and departmental levels has kept us busy.

Labor is one ongoing issue that your association is working on. In the state legislature, you can expect to hear more talk about how the minimum wage is being implemented, and further wage and hour regulations that are likely to be proposed. The battle at the ballot box continues on as well, with new measures proposed each year.

At the federal level, we continue to talk about immigration reform. In early August, we stood up together with a diverse group of people to call for federal action on this issue. They included Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek, ag organizations and groups representing labor, education and the faith community.

With the higher cost to employ and the lack of immigrant workers, our labor shortage is worsening. It's negatively impacting our economic growth now, and unless something's done, nothing will improve in that regard.

Another key issue is the health of the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Nursery Program. The Nursery Advisory Board and our association are working with ODA to help institute ongoing strategies for continued excellence in service and partnership with our industry. Like many of our state agencies, ODA must deal with the rising cost of the Public Employee Retirement System while still providing needed services to nurseries and agriculture. In addition, it's critically important to ensure that the department has smooth and efficient operations. Fortunately, we have a good working relationship with ODA. That helps ensure that our products enjoy consumer confidence, as well as timely and predictable market access.

The last issue I will mention is water. Although 2016 was a much better year than 2015 in terms of drought, the increasing demand on our state's water supplies is affecting our ability to grow plants and our businesses. We need water supplies that are both plentiful and clean. That requires us to work on both supply and storage projects, as well as environmental ones. The federal government is starting to really address the water issue, and we want to be at the table to ensure that the answer is holistic and considers all users and needs.

On the association level, the Executive Committee and the Board continue to work on the health of our own organization. We have revamped the committee structure to more accurately reflect the activities and interests of our members.

Going forward, we look to take that work to the Board and Chapter levels. There is a commitment to making the association valuable and relevant to you, our members.

Entering my last month in office — my "lame duck" month — I can see that others are ready to move up and take on new responsibilities. We are fortunate to have a great group of leaders on the Executive Committee who are ready and able to roll up their sleeves and keep your association on the forefront of the nursery industry.

Our incoming president, Mark Bigej, will do a fantastic job as the face and voice for our association. His blend of consumer and grower experiences gives him a unique perspective. Best of luck to him for a successful year!

I will close by saying thank you for your support this year! It was an honor to be your president. Our association has an excellent reputation among our industry, within our state and nation. You should be proud to be a part of it — I know I am! ☺



Leigh Geschwill
OAN PRESIDENT