

You are the X factor

I must admit I was conflicted about the topic for this month's column: politics. Political lines have never been so clearly drawn and tempers never so short. There is so much uncertainty with the new administration at the national level.

State legislatures across the country are outlining bills that could impact how the nursery and greenhouse industry does business. Some of the bills are good, but make no mistake — many are harmful.

Times like these can ignite passions and anger for some people, while providing hope and promise to others. But as an industry, we must be — and we must act — as one. To be successful we must express our desired outcomes to some shared problems.

In short, we must be the X factor in the debate.

The association provides service and protection

The OAN is known for providing a wide range of top-of-the-line services for its members.

The first-in-the-market Nursery Guide book and modern, easy-to-use NurseryGuide.com is tops among these services. Both will bring customers to your door.

We also have one of the best trade shows in the country — the Farwest Show. It is growing again, in large part because it emphasizes growers. And because it's held in Oregon, a leading nursery state, in the summer, it's greener than other shows.

But in addition to helping you market your business, we make it easier to run it. We have put together customized and affordable health care programs, first aid trainings, and — should you get into a pinch — free access to 30 minutes per month of industry-proven legal counsel.

These are all good reasons to join and continue membership. Your dues make all of them possible.

However, what is less understood is something that gets a lot of public attention — advocacy and our government relations program.

Our advocacy effort is shaped by members, implemented by professional staff, and time tested. We emphasize the challenges and issues that affect you most.

That's why OAN members get such tremendous value for their dues dollar. We did the math. Our largest members pay less than 2 cents per hour for our advocacy effort. For our smallest members, the total annual cost is less than two pitchers of beer.

The OAN's voice is effective because it is respected. People involved in the process know that we are about solutions first. We get in the headlines, and push for open trade, labor availability, reasonable regulations, and a tax system that encourages your businesses to grow and be the best it can be.

As your executive director, I have almost three decades of government relations experience at the state and federal level. I do not have an off-switch — just ask my wife. To assist, we have a team of lobbyists that mirrors the values of the membership and your hard work.

The bottom line? The OAN Government Relations Team is working for you 24/7.

It is you, the member, who makes the difference

Although we speak on behalf of nurseries, we are not the industry's best advocate. You are.

That's why, during the course of 2017, the OAN's Government Relations Committee is putting out the call to members to engage and get more active at the state legislature. In fact, we held a recent training to show members how to be effective citizen lobbyists. It was a tremendous success, and we couldn't be more proud of how OAN members are engaged, intelligent and problem solving.

Please know that elected leaders respect who you are and what you do. Your words can show them the real impact of a proposed policy, administrative rule or controversial issue. You are



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the expert, and your words carry enormous influence.

This year, we will need that influence. We expect to see many bills that directly affect the members of our association, starting with bills that place new mandates on employers.

Additionally, right-to-farm issues are on the table. Significant water policy issues are in play, including a myriad of fees and liability generating concepts. Infrastructure needs for transportation will be a centerpiece of debate.

And of course, taking center stage will be efforts to generate revenue and raise taxes.

At the state level, one isolated voice cannot stand up against the big forces at work. However, many voices of reason and experience, coordinated with your respected trade association, can absolutely make a difference.

The OAN name carries weight and opens doors. The association is smart, shrewd and uses facts and collaboration as ways to influence the trajectory of policies that lawmakers are considering. We give you early warning on upcoming legislation, so you have time to strategize for your business.

We all share the desire to put the industry in a position to be successful. This trade association is battle tested and ready to assist you in making Oregon and our nation a place where hard work is rewarded. We provide opportunities for the nursery and greenhouse industry to grow and prosper.

Please consider the opportunity you have as a member to use your voice and make a difference. I could not be more proud to serve you. ☺