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Standing up for the industry

On Valentine's Day, our group of about 15 OAN members and professional government relations staff visited the Oregon State Capitol.



Mike Hiller
OAN PRESIDENT

We split up into three groups of five to have meetings and meaningful conversations with our state senators and representatives in their offices.

The annual OAN Advocacy Day has been one of our most effective tools to deliver our message to policy makers and engage them on the issues that are important to the green industry.

For me personally, this day was very rewarding. I was able to spend time with state leaders but also respected nursery colleagues. I remember specifically talking to one senator and then looking to my right and seeing long-timers like Dick Joyce, Jerry Simnitt, Jeff Stone and Curt Kipp, and thinking to myself what an honor it is to be here experiencing this. It really is a privilege to help represent our industry.

I am not used to direct engagement in politics — I am more comfortable at the nursery growing plants. Nonetheless, I know very well the things that keep me up at night as a nursery professional. And when given the opportunity to explain those worries, well, that particular message can roll right on out of my mouth — no notes needed.

My three biggest worries are water, labor and making the nursery profitable.

By going to the capital and talking about our issues in our own words, we bring the human element that is so critical. Writing letters and submitting carefully prepared written testimony is one thing, but a personal dialogue validates the message. One can see the emotion of the person you are talking to. It is genuine. We may not see eye-to-eye on all issues, but we are all human.

My three biggest worries are water, labor and making the nursery profitable.

Our professional staff makes sure that elected leaders are aware we have the economic significance to back up our message. Nearly every message includes our sales totals — \$947 million worth of nursery and greenhouse material grown and sold in the state of Oregon, with three-fourths of it going to out-of-state markets.

Our nursery industry brings thousands of jobs to the state. According to stats from the Oregon Employment Department, Oregon nurseries and Christmas tree farms employ an average of 9,300 workers in horticultural production throughout the year, with a total annual payroll of \$317.3 million, as of 2017.

Our staff cites these numbers all the time. OAN Advocacy Day is important because it gives those numbers some real names and faces that lawmakers can relate to.

By the end of June, this legislative session will be winding down or completed, but our government relations work never stops. Our ONPAC leadership and lobbyists work around the clock to give us that connection to the decision makers.

I can personally promise that we make every effort to convey our message and participate in every way that we can. We do our best to support positive legislation for the industry, while mitigating the effects of any proposals that aren't so good. Not every issue will be resolved how we would like it to be, but I know we did our best to reach the best outcomes possible for our industry. ©