

Elections have consequences

I am privileged and honored to serve an Oregon nursery industry that is hardworking, honest and committed to excellence.

Our association sets an example for others around the country on how to approach turbulent issues, such as the environment, education and workforce development. We stake out moderate views on taxation and employer regulations. We are bipartisan and do things the right way. We are fierce advocates for all growers, greenhouse operators, retail operations and suppliers.

But I can't sugarcoat the 2019 session of the Oregon Legislature. It has been a disaster for the nursery, greenhouse and garden center industry.

With the end of the legislative session in June, we will see the totality of bills and policies enacted — positive and negative. Then we can evaluate the cumulative impact of legislation on one of the state's most treasured traded economic sectors. But at this writing, in mid-May, it doesn't look good.

Decade of moderate political action

We appreciate every dollar that members invest into OAN. Every member investment builds to a cumulative impact, whether that investment is made through dues, a Farwest Show booth, our publications, Nursery Guide, or the other high-quality services the association delivers.

OAN leaders raise money for the Oregon Nurseries' Political Action Committee (ONPAC) over a two-year cycle. Members then meet for two days to conduct candidate interviews, and evaluate which candidates we should support.

The OAN does not compel members to donate to the PAC. Instead, we rely on two events — the Duffers Classic golf tournament and our annual convention — to raise funds. We also allow members the option to add PAC dollars to their membership renewal.

All funds are carefully invested in the right candidates and races. Our volunteer leaders make the decisions.

People often say that politics and elections are dirty — something deserving of derision. With today's dysfunctional politics,

there's no shortage of reasons to disagree.

At the same time, politics is actually our system of solving problems. When the right people are in office, it still may be sloppy, but it works. That's why it's so critical that we take part in lobbying and endorsements. Elections matter.

The Park principle

There is no Magic 8-Ball or fortune teller that will reliably help us understand the consequences of candidate selection. Like anything else, the candidates we see will include rising stars, those who were all bluster and a bust, and those who just blend into a mindless compliance to their party leaders.

However, we can derive a lesson from 2004: support your own.

Gresham, Oregon nursery owner Rod Park had served as an elected Metro Councilor. Having reached his term limits with Metro, he threw his hat in the ring in an open primary for the Democratic Party nomination in his senate district.

With no incumbent to contend with and very strong name recognition, Rod was a strong horse to bet on. He ran against a solid candidate — a nurse — and both sought the endorsement of our industry. There are lots of nursery and farm operations around. The industry endorsement carries a lot of weight.

Rod was (and remains) a longtime member of OAN, a past president of the association and a former elected regional government official with many connections. For reasons that are best addressed by those in the room at that time, he was not endorsed. This caused hard feelings.

Rod's opponent won the primary and general, and has served in the legislature ever since. If Rod was there instead, I am certain the tax debate we heard this year would be vastly different. State Sen. Rod Park would have been a voice of reason in a tax debate.

Since that time, ONPAC has consistently supported its own when they have stepped up to run for office. They've included Bob Terry, Kathy LeCompte and Jim Gilbert. They don't share the same partisan alignment or viewpoints. However, they all share a love for, and commitment to, the nursery industry. That matters.



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Lessons from my mentor

U.S. Sen. Bob Packwood (R-Oregon) was my boss for eight years and has been a valuable mentor to me throughout my career. He was initially elected to the Oregon House of Representatives as a Republican from Portland and rose into leadership.

In 1962, he was tasked with winning enough seats for the GOP to take control. He found quality candidates who fit the area they would be representing, had a commitment to service, and could win. Some didn't share his personal political philosophy.

For Republicans, the 1964 election was a disaster nationally (GOP nominee Barry Goldwater was up against incumbent president Lyndon B. Johnson). But under Packwood's vision, Oregon was the only state to flip a chamber to Republican control.

The lesson here is not about Republicans and Democrats — it's about cultivating the right candidates for the right districts, as the senator did, and keeping a laser focus. I firmly believe that agriculture is fertile ground for bringing voices that matter to a political environment that is increasingly controlled by urban interests.

Where to from here?

The outcomes from the 2019 Oregon Legislature tell us we need to start a conversation. Duffers is really not about golf — the activity is merely the catalyst to bring us together. Similarly, we bond at Convention and raise some money along the way. Together we can reset our priorities and chart a new path to solving our state's problems.