

It is go time

It seems like the same narrative happens at the beginning of every year: “This is a make-or-break year for the industry.”

But I am going to say it: 2022 will be a defining year.

We grow, sell and ship the best nursery and greenhouse products in the country. But every year, there has been a steady diet of regulation and structural obstacles that keep our industry from doing what it does so well.

If these obstacles were isolated, we could deal with it. Instead, we have decision-makers who seem to think water comes from a tap and plants magically arrive at retail locations. That’s why we focus on political engagement, so people can be informed about our industry before making decisions that affect it.

I fully recognize that many of our members would rather have their right arm severed than engage in anything political. Politics is a dirty word. Processes are unpredictable and often unfair. All of that deserves your derision.

However, the OAN knows the political landscape — pitfalls, land mines and all. When you get involved, our experienced guidance and resources will ensure you are not alone. What we know most of all is that you, the member, are the best voice for the industry. We need your involvement. With your help, we can deliver for the industry. We are asking you to engage.

It is go time.

The shifting landscape

Power is fleeting, even in Oregon. It shifts within parties and within a caucus. Even for those in charge, new centers of power can pop up and destabilize things. Centers of gravity in a caucus room make all the difference.

Of late in Oregon, we have seen shifts away from “moderate problem solvers” to the extended reaches of each party. Let me call it as I see it — some people want chaos. They come to the table with a gas

can and a match, without regard for long-term solutions. Chaos has consequences.

I come from a school of politics shaped by my former boss, retired U.S. Sen. Bob Packwood, an Oregon Republican.

Packwood believed that the people drive Congress and the Oregon Legislature, not the elected members. He taught me, and I believe, that elections reflect the will of the people. Whether or not we agree, districts elect people who reflect the district.

But there’s no denying we’ve seen a change. Many congressional and state legislative members are in solid shape in their districts — too solid. Swing districts are very few. Purity of ranks then takes hold. That’s how “crazy town” people get elected.

Relationships matter

Even in this chaotic environment, politics is all about relationships. It means listening to one another and learning the difference between what people want and what they need. Don’t burn a bridge, because you never know when you will need a partner on an issue that you neither contemplate nor recognize in the future.

Look. Salem and DC’s process can be opaque, orchestrated or just a plain farce. Agricultural overtime discussions happening right now are a perfect example. Farm labor advocates and leaders from the Democratic aisle are very quick to make judgments on farm operations without necessarily grasping farm economics. Deliberations toward honest solutions are cast aside for political expediency and fundraising optics.

For issues that alter the very fabric and viability of an industry, it still comes back to the voices of our diverse industry. Not tactics, but truth. Letting people know the reality.

I remember wins and losses. Both have lessons you must observe. Not many understand the need to be good at reacting to what happened, good or bad. When it comes down to it, victories and setbacks will come. I am more likely to remember the people, not the politics. Legislative fights come and go, but personal relationships stick around and set the stage for the next day.



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Training to maximize your voice

The not-so-hidden secret, at both the state and federal levels, is that a low percentage of your elected officials read each law they are voting on. Staff usually have a better handle, since they are divided into subject areas. Committee staff tend to be the best stewards on complex codes and regulations. However, there is no better influencer or educator than you, the member.

In any policy debate, legislators should be looking at how the policy will impact real people. You have the unique ability to talk about what you know and help good people understand the consequences of a vote. If we are silent or do not have a plethora of voices, rowing in the same direction, we fall victim to the old adage that a legislator can do more with the stroke of a pen to harm an industry.

I personally balk at the term lobbyist. When I was in government at the federal or regional level, it always seemed slick and sleazy. On the trade association side, I view myself not as a lobbyist, but as a vocal and focused advocate for a sane industry.

We train members how to be effective and tell their stories. We do what we can to understand the contours of a decision. We do our level best to help inform the decision-maker. I have more than 30 years of experience, and I understand a fundamental truth: You are the best voice.

We are holding an Advocacy Training for members on January 26 — contact me for details at jstone@oan.org. Please join us for tailored training to maximize your voice. It’s time to contribute and support our great industry. ©