

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

September/October 2004

Adventures in Advocacy

Voting Toward Your Bottom Line by Sean. D. Shields

This November, you and approximately 115 million other Americans will head to the ballot box and vote for lawmakers from the President of the United States to the Chairman of your local school board. While public interest in voting has dwindled due mainly to the perception that individual votes don't matter, recent events have shown this couldn't be farther from the truth.

As witnessed in the last presidential election, virtually a handful of voters in Florida made the difference in an election where over 106 million votes were cast. But that occurrence overshadows the fact that in Congressional races, numerous victors win by less than 1000 votes. For example, in the newly created 7th Congressional District in Colorado, Republican Bob Beauprez defeated Democrat Mike Feeley by a scant 121 votes in 2002. Now, as a serious incumbent who served on the powerful House Transportation Committee, Representative Beauprez has all but locked up his bid for re-election with over \$1 million in his campaign war chest and no legitimate opponent.

What this tells us is that individual votes do matter, particularly when all 435 members of the U. S. House of Representatives are required to run every two years. This concept translates very closely to the work those elected officials are chosen to perform. During the first session of the 108th Congress last year, the controversial jobs, growth and tax relief bill (H.R. 2), which reduced taxes on dividends and capital gains, expanded expensing and increased bonus depreciation for businesses and reduced taxes for individuals and many small businesses passed by only 31 votes in the House and one vote in the Senate. Additionally, in May the Occupational Safety and Health Independent Review of OSHA Citations Act of 2003 (H.R. 2730), which helps level the playing field with OSHA for small businesses passed by only 20 votes, 224-204.

This close correlation between the narrow margin of victory for some candidates and the even smaller margin needed for the passage of nationwide legislation should empower you as a business owner to take action in the upcoming election. Not only does your vote carry potentially significant weight toward electing a pro-business versus an anti-business candidate, the votes of each of your employees do as well. The better informed you and your employees are on the candidates, the more effective you can be in the voting booth.

There are various factors to weigh in deciding which candidate to support: political ideology, party affiliation, single-issue viewpoints and voting performance. Though preference in the first three factors are generally formulated early in life, born out of personal experience or beliefs, the last factor may potentially have the greatest impact on the operation of your business. While the promises offered up on the campaign trail are encouraging, actual recorded votes are the hard evidence on where a candidate's heart truly lies.

To aid you in discovering candidates' stances on pro-business operations, tax reform, medical insurance costs and environmental regulation, SBC Magazine has posted voting records and rankings of the members of the 108th Congress on its website. To save you valuable time, staff has narrowed individual voting records to a few key pieces of legislation that directly affect your business. In addition, each lawmaker has received a percentage which corresponds to their overall vote performance on pro-business legislation.

Beyond assisting you in evaluating candidates, this information can also be useful for your employees to consider before they go into the voting booth. Just as changes in regulations affect your operating costs and business environment, they affect your employees' opportunities for advancement, professional growth, increased earning power and affordable medical coverage. In this regard, communicating this relationship with your employees is important in motivating them to not only vote, but to consider heavily the benefits of supporting candidates that support their livelihood.

Ultimately, the goal is to increase understanding of the political environment that exists in America today, where the participation of a relatively few number of individuals in the voting process can make a significant impact on the makeup of Congress and, consequently, the direction of our businesses and livelihoods over the next two years.

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