

How to be politically effective

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I. WHY GET INVOLVED?

A. POLITICAL ACTIVITY IS CRITICAL FOR YOUR BUSINESS.

If there was ever a group of people who should have an interest in how the government works, it is the people of this industry. The alcohol beverage industry is one of the most highly taxed industries and most highly regulated industries in the United States. Every aspect of the industry from manufacture to hours of sale is regulated by one level of government or the other.

Further, because of the nature of the product you sell, and because of the strong feelings that some segments of society have about the product, you can be sure that alcohol will always be subject to high taxation, that it will always be subject to extensive regulation, and that you will always be facing efforts by some to further limit its availability to the public.

The truth of the matter is that so long as you are in the alcohol beverage business your livelihood will be at the mercy of the elected officials who directly or indirectly regulate your business. **With the government playing such an important role in your business, it is just plain foolish if you are not actively involved in the political process.**

B. YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Very few people truly appreciate how lucky we are to live in a democracy. Under the democratic form of government, individuals are able to participate and are able to make their voice heard. Most people who complain about not being able to change things have never really tried. That is not to say that a person can or should get in a position to dictate every decision a legislator or the government makes. However, anyone who is willing to work and to put some time

and energy into the political process can get themselves in a position where their opinion is listened to and where they are given a fair opportunity to have input on legislation affecting them.

The secret to getting yourself in a position of political influence is your willingness to invest time, energy, and money in the political process. If you can motivate yourself to do these three things, you can have a real impact upon how the government works.

C. YOUR MAIN GOAL: TO BE KNOWN PERSONALLY BY YOUR LEGISLATOR.

Your real goal in political activity should be to know your elected officials on a first name basis, and **for your elected officials to know you on a first name basis.** If you can accomplish that you'll be amazed at how responsive government can be to your needs.

It is easy for your legislator to pass a tax which affects an anonymous class known as "alcohol beverage retailers". But it is much more difficult for that legislator to vote for a tax which will hurt an individual human being who he knows and works with on an on-going basis.

The primary goal of your political activity is to stand out as an individual human being and to become personally known to the candidate as a friend and supporter. **Your goal should be to know your legislator well enough so that when you have a concern, the legislator will return your phone calls and will listen to your problems and give you a fair opportunity to be heard.** He may or may not vote with you, but at least you will have had the opportunity to have some input.

II. HOW TO BECOME POLITICALLY ACTIVE.

The ideal time to become involved is during a political campaign when your elected officials genuinely need your help. There are three general ways to become active. The first is to **contribute** to the candidate's campaign,

the second is to become a **worker** for the candidate, and the third is to be an **organizer** for the candidate.

A. CONTRIBUTE MONEY.

The most obvious form of activity is the simplest, even though it may hurt the most up front — that is to contribute money to the candidate's campaign. Unfortunately in this age of expensive media, money contributions are more and more important in elections. Naturally, this can get to be very expensive on your part, but if at all possible you should contribute frequently to political campaigns and you should contribute as much as possible.

Money contributions should always be **non-corporate** contributions since it is generally illegal for a corporation to contribute funds to a candidate. Also money contributions should always be in the form of a check — never in cash. A check insures that you have a documented record of the contribution, and it assists the candidate in his record keeping to insure that the contribution is correctly reported to the appropriate governmental authorities.

When you do contribute funds to a candidate's campaign, there are a few ways to maximize the benefit of that contribution. First, **always deliver your contribution personally to the candidate.** Never drop it in the mail to the candidate, don't give it to the campaign manager or to some aide. Personally deliver the contribution. This is a good entree to meeting a candidate you don't know well. The candidate will remember you, and he will remember that you are a supporter. Unless you personally deliver your contribution to the candidate, your contribution becomes just one of many he may see on a list.

Another way to maximize a monetary contribution is to **solicit contributions from several of your friends or retailers, and deliver the contributions personally to the candidate.** If you walk in with four or five checks, one from you and then four or five from other people, your small contribution will seem a lot larger.

Along the same lines, it's often best to **establish a key person who is close to and knows a particular legislator.** Almost always, it is best if that key person is a constituent from the district of the legislator involved. For that reason, you may wish to contribute to a candidate who is out of your district by giving your check (made out to the candidate's campaign) to the key retailer for that legislator, who will in turn deliver your contribution as well as the contribution of others to the candidate. By helping each other out, by using this leveraging of political contributions, even a relatively small individual contribution can have a major statewide impact.

B. NON-MONETARY CONTRIBUTIONS.

Another type of contribution which you can make doesn't necessarily involve money. If you have a storefront or real estate that has visibility from a road or a highway, let the candidate know he can put signs on it. If your candidate doesn't live in your town, offer your home as a place for the candidate to stay while visiting your town. If the candidate is hosting a reception, you may want to help by furnishing some of the alcohol beverages. However, any time a contribution such as this is made, you need to be very careful to comply with your state and federal campaign contribution laws. Generally corporate contributions are illegal, so any contribution you make is going to have to be a personal contribution. Also, contributions must generally be reported, and you need to be very careful to provide the candidate with adequate information so that the contributions can be lawfully reported.

C. VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME TO WORK FOR THE CANDIDATE.

The one thing candidates generally need almost as badly as campaign funds is loyal campaign workers. Even if you can't contribute a great deal of money to a campaign, you should make an extra effort to donate your time and energy. In some ways working for a candidate can be even more effective than contributing money because the candidate has more opportunity to see

you working and to meet you and visit with you. The first step is to **let the candidate know that you are willing to work in the campaign.** Ask where he needs you most, and commit to help. Most importantly **once you commit to do something be sure to keep your word and do it.**

Campaigns almost always need people to make phone calls for the candidate or to stuff envelopes or address letters. Volunteer to help with these jobs. Volunteer to come early to

"meet your candidate" forums and other similar events to distribute the candidate's literature. You can even offer to walk your portion of the district with the candidate introducing him to people you know or merely distributing literature. **Whatever you do, try to do it from the candidate's headquarters or in such other fashion as to be as visible to the candidate himself as possible.** It does you little good if you work hard for the

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candidate, but the candidate never knows about it.

If you ever jump into a political campaign and become a hard worker, you will find that it's a lot more fun than you might expect. Political campaigns are exciting and you will find yourself developing a comradeship with other members of your candidate's team. It's a tremendous opportunity to meet new people, many of whom are influential in the community. Also many of the people you work with will be the elected officials of tomorrow or staff members of elected officials. For an investment of a relatively small amount of your time you can be a highly visible worker for a candidate and can help create the image that you are an important part of the elected official's team.

D. BE AN ORGANIZER.

The next major way you can become active in a political campaign is as an organizer. The simplest way to be an organizer is to get your friends and family involved in working in the campaign in some of the ways outlined earlier. Generally what you are trying to do is to act as a catalyst to get other people to work for the campaign. This can be done in a number of ways. If you maintain a mailing list for your business, **volunteer your mailing list to the candidate or volunteer to send postcards yourself to the people on your list** urging their support for the candidate.

Volunteer to contact potential contributors to help raise funds for the candidate. Offer to **host a cocktail party or a breakfast** or some other sort of reception or fund raiser at your home for the candidate. Try to **personally introduce the candidate** to as many people as you can at the reception.

Work with the candidate to help arrange for the candidate to speak to any civic groups or other groups that you may be associated with. Offer to help organize a transportation system to get voters to the polls on election day. Help set up a reporting network for election results on election day. There are any number of ways in which you can help to organize a campaign and to

genuinely help your candidate. Again on organizational efforts like this, you need to be sure you coordinate it with the candidate or the candidate's campaign manager, and so much as is possible, you should be sure that the candidate is personally aware of your efforts.

E. THREE IMPORTANT RULES.

Although these have been mentioned earlier, there are three very important rules you should always keep in mind if you are seeking to be politically effective.

1. **Develop a personal relationship.**

The first rule is that you want to develop a personal relationship with the candidate. You want him to know you as a person and you want to know him as a person. You don't want to obnoxiously monopolize his time, but you also don't want to be just a face in the crowd.

2. **Be visible in your support.** Any work you do for the candidate should be as visible as possible to the candidate and to his key people. If you make a hundred phone calls from your house nobody is going to know about it but you. If you make those calls from the candidate's headquarters the candidate will know about it, the campaign manager will know about it, and you will gain a lot more credit for the work you do.

3. **Use leverage.** The third general rule is to use leverage. Your contribution to the campaign will be much more valuable if you are a visible catalyst for getting other people involved. As mentioned before this includes collecting contributions from others and delivering them to the candidate and getting teams of people organized to perform specific functions for the candidate. The more you can be known as a person who gets others to work for the candidate, the more important your role will be on the candidate's team.

F. WHAT DO YOU DO AFTER THE ELECTION?

You have worked in the candidate's campaign and the election is over. What do you do next? Basically you want to maintain contact with the candidate. If your candidate won,

attend the victory party for your candidate. Have a good time and revel in the victory. Send your candidate a personal note congratulating him and telling him how much you enjoyed working in the campaign and that you're glad he won. After the candidate has recuperated from the campaign, invite the candidate to your home or set up some other informal meeting with him at his convenience. Let the candidate know that if he needs your help on something in the future, you're available to help. Generally keep up the contact and the friendship that you have built during the campaign so that when you need to get your legislator's attention, you can easily get an appointment with him or have your phone call returned.

G. WHAT IF YOUR CANDIDATE LOSES?

What do you do if your candidate loses? First, attend the election-night party for the candidate. After things have settled down let your candidate know of your disappointment in this loss. Write him a personal note expressing this. Don't give up on the election process. Remember the candidate may run for future office — and he'll remember his early friends.

Also if you worked for a losing candidate, **don't be afraid to establish contact with the winning candidate.** If you have built a reputation as a hard worker, a smart elected official is going to want to get you on his team. Congratulate the winner, and offer to help with any campaign deficit there may be. Offer to help that candidate in the future. The truth of the matter is that the official who won is going to be the official you'll have to deal with in the legislative process, so do your best to mend fences and to become a part of the winning team. If the candidate is smart, he'll welcome you because it won't be very long before that candidate is up for re-election again.

H. WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR CANDIDATE IS UNOPPOSED — OR IS NOT UP FOR RE-ELECTION THIS YEAR.

When your candidate is up for re-election but is running unopposed you should generally take exactly the same

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steps you would take if the candidate faced opposition. Even when unopposed, candidates are concerned about making a good showing at the polls. If a large number of those people voting simply choose not to vote for the candidate, that candidate is much more likely to receive the opposition in the future. Therefore, the candidate, and you, should treat the race just as if it were a contested election.

Generally you should visit with the candidate, contribute money to his campaign, and volunteer to help in whatever way possible in his re-election campaign. One advantage to approaching a candidate at this time is that your enthusiasm may stand out even more since most people will not feel a need to be active in the race.

If your legislator is not up for re-election this election year, there are other ways you can help. As a general rule effective elected officials campaign for re-election 365 days a year. They always appreciate favorable press coverage and the opportunity to solidify votes. Work with your legislator to help him set up speaking dates before civic organizations. You could see that the candidate gets invitations to participate or speak at events which receive publicity in your community, for example ribbon cuttings, county fairs, etc. If you feel that you could do so successfully, you might wish to volunteer to organize an appreciation dinner in your community for the legislator, making sure you get local press coverage. Whatever you do, make sure your legislator personally knows you are helping, and that you are available to help.

III. STEPS TO TAKE DURING A LEGISLATIVE CRISIS

So far we've discussed your role. But there will ultimately be a time when you must call upon the legislator for his help. The legislative committee of your trade association will closely monitor activities in Washington and the statehouse — and they will alert you when there is a crisis requiring your action. When that alert is given, what should you do?

A. ACT IMMEDIATELY WHEN ASKED.

In a legislative crisis, things happen very quickly and with very little advance warning. When you are asked by your legislative committee to contact your legislator — **do so immediately.** Hours and even minutes can make an important difference during a crisis.

B. WHEN ASKED TO CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATOR, WHAT DO YOU DO?

First, you should personally visit or telephone the official. Hopefully you will have built up such a rapport that you can get an appointment and can personally express your concerns. If you cannot personally speak to the legislator, leave a message for your legislator to return your call. If it is urgent, leave the specific message. Also if you have not spoken with the candidate personally, follow up with a telegram expressing your concern. If the crisis is severe enough — consider going to the capitol yourself to talk face-to-face with your legislator.

If you were able to visit with your legislator, follow up your visit with a letter thanking your legislator for his time and restating your concern.

Always be honest and straightforward when discussing your problem with the official. Remember, you are part of your elected official's team, and you never want to mislead the official or otherwise cause the elected official embarrassment.

When you visit the legislator, state your concern as clearly as possible. State it in personal terms as to how you will personally be affected. If it will hurt your business, tell him so and explain why. If you know who the opposition to your positions is going to be, don't be afraid to identify the opposition and to be as candid as you can with your legislator. You want to make sure that if your legislator makes a commitment to you, he does so with his eyes open as to who will be working against you. Be constructive. If you learn that the legislator has certain concerns about your problem, try to put yourself in his shoes and see if you can't come up with a solution that addresses your problem as well as addressing his. Don't be a self-appointed spokesman for the entire industry. Unsupported claims of strength or influence will only hurt

you.

And of course **never demand or threaten or be belligerent in any way.** This advice is probably the most important. Even if your elected official is a good friend, you've got to realize that he will sometimes vote against you. It is his job to weigh different competing interests and every time he makes a decision, he is going to vote **for** someone and **against** someone else. Sometimes that vote will be against you. And when that happens the worst thing you can do is to get angry. Tell the candidate you understand, that you wish he would reconsider his position, but don't hurt yourself by getting angry.

Sidney Sigel, a prominent Dallas retailer who was very politically active, told the story of how we went in to talk to an elected official with a young retailer. They explained their position on a particular issue, and the legislator was honest enough to tell them that he was going to have to vote the other way. The young retailer proceeded to get hostile and really chewed the official out. As they left the office, Sidney turned to the young retailer and said, "Young man, I'll admit I may have lost the man's vote on this issue, but you may have lost his vote on every issue in the future".

Mr. Sigel's advice is well taken. There are many issues which come before the legislator affecting this industry. You must realize that sometimes the legislator will vote with you and sometimes he'll vote against you. The worst thing you can do is to get angry and alienate the legislator. Because, if anything is certain in this industry, it is that there will always be some new crisis tomorrow in which you will need that legislator's help again.

IV. SUMMARY

Your industry is directly affected by the decisions of elected officials and it is vitally important that you be politically active in the campaigns of your elected officials. Your political activity will not guarantee that a legislator votes as you might wish him to. However, if you work hard for the candidate when the candidate needs your help, you are much more likely to

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be able to talk to the candidate and to make your voice heard when you need his help. If you aren't politically active, and if your fellow retailers are not politically active, you're going to find the industry facing an even more hostile legislative climate than it is now. You owe it to yourself, to your business, and to this industry to dedicate a certain percentage of your resources toward political activity. Hopefully, this information will give you ideas on how to maximize your effectiveness.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A LEGISLATOR.

Writing effective letters to your Senators and Representatives is not difficult. Here are a few guidelines that will make writing to them easier and more productive.

Write on your personal or business stationery, if possible. Sign your name over your typed signature at the end of the message.

Be sure that your return address is on your letter, not just on the envelope. Envelopes sometimes get misplaced before the letter is answered.

Identify the subject of your letter clearly, for example: proposed tax increase on alcoholic beverages.

State your reason for writing. Your own personal experience is your best supporting evidence. Explain how the legislation would affect you, your family, or your business, or what effect it would have on the public of your community of your state.

Be polite. NEVER demand or threaten. A hostile letter will only hurt your cause.

Avoid trite phrases or sentences. Cliches make your letter appear to be part of an organized "pressure" campaign — and, thus, minimize the impact of your message.

Be constructive. Indicate you believe that the proposed tax increase, bill, etc. takes the wrong approach toward solving the problem, explain what you believe the right approach is, for example: if a tax is needed, don't just penalize one type of business.

Write as an individual, not as a self-appointed spokesman for the entire industry. Unsupported claims of

political influence only cast doubt upon the view you express.

Concentrate on your own delegation. The opinions of a local constituent are much more important than those of someone outside the district.

ACT NOW. Things can happen very fast in the legislature and your immediate input is critical to the outcome of most battles.

Thank your legislators if they please you with a vote. Everybody appreciates a complimentary letter — and remembers it. If they vote against you, do not get angry with them. They may have voted against you on this issue, but you will need their help on other issues in the future.

Citizens in action

*By Donna Healy,
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It is our right and responsibility as Citizens of the United States — and as members of the beverage alcohol industry — to become involved in the governmental process. We can do this best if we are first informed on the issues and then effectively communicate our concerns. One of the best ways to communicate our concerns is through letter writing — to editors of newspapers and other publications, as well as to our legislators and public officials.

Printed below is a suggested sample letter which was drafted by Laura M. Rauber, National Legislative Chairman of WAABI, who works for DISCUS in Washington, D.C. This letter conveys the industry's position on the issue of alcohol versus illegal drugs that has sprung up in newspapers across the country recently. We should pay particular attention to this issue and should respond when it is appropriate.

Dear:

We are taking this opportunity to inform you of our utmost concern over the increasing linkage of beverage alcohol to illegal drugs, such as cocaine.

In the past few weeks, various newspaper articles have attempted to link illegal drugs with the responsible

use of beverage alcohol. Ninety percent of the American public who choose to drink beverage alcohol do so responsibly and with sound judgment.

THERE CAN BE NO RESPONSIBLE USE OF ILLEGAL DRUGS!

To equate these vastly different products does not advance public health objectives. It merely confuses the public and is counterproductive to educational programs aimed at reducing alcohol abuse.

Alcohol abuse is a serious problem, but linking alcohol with illegal drugs is not the answer. We are winning the fight against alcohol abuse. Through education and treatment. Let's not jeopardize these efforts.

Sincerely,

Please pay particular attention to the press in your communities and respond in a positive and timely manner.