



Politics and Associated Industries: Making informed decisions

By Jim DeWalt,
President / CEO

It's that time of the year and, no, I'm not referring to the holiday season – it's the political season: signs along roadways and in front yards, banners and more signs on bridges and overpasses, and invitations to all manner of “kick-off” events and fundraisers. Representative government at work.

But it's a serious time with serious issues. Lots of choices and decisions to be made at every turn: local, state and national levels; office-seekers asking to be elected or re-elected; new laws being proposed through the initiative process (lots of initiatives this year, so be prepared to run a gauntlet of signature gatherers this summer at every home center, grocery store and fruit stand.)

Since inception in 1910, Associated Industries has continued to grow in both size and scope to its current position as a statewide organization with members across a wide variety of industries and business interests. This diversity is a large part of what makes the organization successful, but it also carries with it an awareness of the role and position the organization can and does play, especially within the political/legislative arena.

A case in point: a few months ago, A.I. was offered an opportunity – an invitation – to meet with one of our U.S. Senators here in Spokane; and we communicated the invitation to the A.I. membership. For doing so, I was taken to task by some who strongly oppose her views and believe she may be the devil incarnate.

While I have no problem whatsoever engaging in a vigorous conversation (I actually enjoy it) the position taken at the time, and the one maintained today, is a view that A.I. assumes an obligation to provide as many opportunities, avenues of dialogue, accurate facts, figures and sources of information to its membership as possible – rather than to presume a position of political advocacy.

There have been exceptions. Last fall, a local issue (Proposition #4) was presented to the public for a vote. After a considered and thoughtful deliberative process, Associated Industries took a public stand in opposition, one of the first to do so. The position was taken in the belief that such a measure exceeded the rightful role of government and would significantly place Spokane businesses at a competitive disadvantage. In the end, the measure was soundly defeated.

Additionally, this organization took the lead in opposing State Insurance Commissioner Kriedler as his office sought to eliminate the ability of associations across the state of Washington (including A.I.) to offer medical benefit health plans to their members. The organization believed the O.I.C. interpretation was wrong and challenged the decision. Given the comprehensive nature of the issue, the Association of Washington Business stood with A.I. in opposition in an effort that ultimately proved successful.

In the coming weeks and months there will be an almost mind-numbing number of issues and candidates to consider, dismiss and ultimately choose from. It is my hope and intent to fulfill our obligation to you as members, by offering information and seeking feedback, as a means of providing one portion of an overall level of service.

As stated within its mission statement: “**Associated Industries is an employer association** dedicated to enhancing the success of member organizations and the greater business community.”

My commitment to each and every member of this organization is an honest effort to do exactly that and I look forward to hearing from you.



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