

# The sprint to November begins right now

**Every four years, we hear from the political pundits that “this election is the most important one in our lifetime” or “our nation and its survival is at stake.”**

Alternatively, we might get a pervasive feeling of dread that our vote won't matter in the end.

Well, this election is very important. The direction (not survival) of our country is at stake, and your vote is incredibly important.

Labor Day is the true starting gun of the general election campaign. Normally, we are already sick and tired of the toxic political discourse, moving rapidly toward the notion that everyone who is running is undeserving.

Whether it is a local school board race, a legislative or statewide contest or the high stakes campaigns for president and Congress, the point is not if a candidate is meritorious for your vote. Rather, the true value to America is the very nature of your right to vote. It is you that sets the importance and the direction of our great country.

## Campaign engagement matters

Our election process is contentious, fractured, at times flawed. I would contend that it is beautiful all the same. No other country can have fundamental disagreements about core values, impactful issues and how we perceive ourselves and our place in the world.

The Oregon Nurseries' Political Action Committee (ONPAC) completed its evaluation of candidates from the local, state and federal arena. Our volunteer leaders are focused on the North Star of building trust, relationships and policy engagement at every level of governmental decision-making. I am proud that this industry is solution oriented, willing to take on the most difficult issues of our time. We put ego aside and choose to work alongside candidates from all walks of life.

Our 2024 was blind to partisanship.

We are laser focused on policy objectives and driving our needs and priorities through the endorsement process. We have several core issues.

We want a fix for agricultural overtime that will help both growers and allow flexibility for workers to work. We're pushing for a green good exemption for Oregon's regressive commercial activities tax. We're promoting a transportation system that delivers on promises made almost a decade ago and finding a funding solution that does not burden our industry. And, we want government accountability through legislative oversight on agencies that are contorting hard-fought legislation to suit the views of those who implement the laws.

Regulations have a cumulative impact. While some rules are well meaning, there are consequences when they are stacked on top of each other. It affects the ability to do business in the state.

On the federal level, we need decency, bipartisanship and the guts to stop kicking the can down the road on important issues. Such issues include immigrant worker visas, investments in transportation and farm programs, and keeping our industry clear of emerging pests and diseases.

## It is up to us to “build bridges, not walls”

Bill Perry is our association's new contract lobbyist. I have worked alongside him for almost 20 years. He is respected by both sides of the aisle for his measured, strategic and commanding presence in the state capitol.

When Bill was at the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association, he and I worked side by side to craft and pass the 2013 driver's card bill for undocumented Oregonians. It was two large associations working across the aisle to pass a bill that nobody thought could be done.

Bill coined a phrase that I have shamelessly stolen: “We build bridges, not walls.” This fits the modern day political ethos of the OAN. In an era of hyper-partisanship, it is up to us to find middle ground, not see opponents as enemies. We must embody a higher standard of con-



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duct and influence on the political process.

Yes, I get about as mad as one can get when we have lost a vote on a policy that was critical to the industry. I hate to lose. Being an old baseball pitcher, I remember very few of my accomplishments on the mound, but can recall the count, pitch and the hit that cost my team a win.

## Get an elected's shoes dirty

With so many new legislators entering public service, we cannot hold on to past behaviors as a guide for the future. We must go where an elected official is in their career and educate them.

Legislators can impact your business with the stroke of a pen. The OAN is extremely effective in bringing them out to see nursery, greenhouse or retail operations. It is a true home turf advantage. The recipe is very simple: 1. Show them what you do; 2. Talk about the family operation and how important it is to you; 3. Respectfully tell the elected official what keeps you up at night related to the challenges you face every day.

You, the member, are the best ambassador the industry has. Build bridges. Not walls.

## Block out the noise, encourage using the right to vote

Polls mean nothing before Labor Day. I would suggest they mean very little until the ultimate poll is taken on Election Day. You have a say on what happens in our community, our state and our nation. Tune out the noise. Trust your instincts. Encourage your family and neighbors to use their God-given right in the United States that is precious and rare — the right to vote. ☺