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Below you will find a real exchange between a CSDA member and former CSDA President Mark Desrosiers, who says it better than I can. These emails focus on ADPAC, rather than CODPAC, because the candidate in question is a member of Congress. ADPAC is our national PAC, associated with the ADA, while CODPAC, associated with CSDA, focuses on in-state legislators and members of the Executive branch.

ORIGINAL MEMBER EMAIL

Dear Local Society President:

I am totally opposed to the CSDA using my dues (and lots of others) to support Mr. Congressman.

First of all, there should be a listing of all these “dental friendly pieces of legislation” that he has supported. I can’t think of any myself. So, how do we know he is a friend of dentistry except for our money?

Secondly, why is the CSDA supporting an individual candidate without the benefit of hearing the opposition? As a Democrat he has supported a lot of legislation that I am personally against. It seems that the CSDA (and since we are the CSDA) is openly supporting Mr. Congressman. I think that is just wrong. I don’t want my dues going for such political favoritism.

I certainly don’t recall Mr. Congressman ever answering when I have asked questions of his office. This just seems to be nothing but a ploy to build his treasure chest. I don’t begrudge him doing this, as it is the political beast we have.

However, I do take exception that the CSDA has taken this route without approval of the membership. It really makes me want to forgo all my memberships in the ADA and even our local society. Why is the CSDA leadership doing this?

I know this was not your idea but you sent this out as President, so as a member of your local society I want it to be known that this is wrong and seemingly a little illegal or at least unethical.

Please feel free to pass this along up the chain of command.

CSDA Member

DR. DESROSIERS’ RESPONSE

Dear CSDA Member,

You bring up a valid point and I hope I will adequately address it. I am quite passionate about this so please bear with the length of this reply.

ADPAC, the American Dental Association Political Action Committee is an organization affiliated at “arm’s length” with the ADA. All operating funds for ADPAC are from voluntary contributions from ADA members and family members. No ADA dues money or proceeds from ADA activities are used for ADPAC funds! So I hope your first point has been addressed.

I shared your distaste for politicians and the process many years ago. Then I saw the light! These politicians make decisions (votes) that impact our lives, our practices, and our patients. Some decisions are good and some are bad. They make their decisions for many reasons. Some of those reasons include what their constituents want (they do want to get re-elected), and some of the reasons are based on the information they have at the time.

Now what is our role? We can sit on the sidelines and complain or we can be part of the process so as to influence these decision makers. When a trial attorney who attended one of my local dental society meetings suggested to us how we could get involved and impact the system, as they so successfully do, it really made me wake up to the reality of the system.

You and I may not like the system, or think it is the best, but it is the system. We can work to impact it or we can let others impact it.

I choose to try my best to impact it, so as to improve the environment in any way I can that will benefit our practices and our patients. This particular event is Mr. Congressman’s attempt to meet with “special interests” to hear our needs while raising money for him.

Yes, I can get down to the nitty gritty. In this case ADPAC sees the value of sending money to sponsor attendance by some of our members. ADPAC raised funds from our members who chose to send money in with their dues payments. I sent in \$1,500 of my own money to ADPAC.

I have a Mitt Romney bumper sticker on my car. I mention that to show that it is not about R or D. I represent the dentists when I speak to Mr. Congressman, as I did when Former Congressman, a Republican, held this seat.

Mr. Congressman has been a good supporter to dentistry, I suspect, in part, because we have worked hard to establish a relationship with him and to make him aware of our issues. He has been a leader in supporting the loan consolidation and refinancing for students, a big issue for our new and soon to be members. He voted for repeal of the McCarran Ferguson Act. He has supported us and voted our way for most of our issues. A current one, important to our military dentists is the push to lower the rank of the highest dental officer in the Army and Air Force from two stars to one star rank. He is on the committee that is addressing this and obviously the ADA members who are in the military feel very strongly about this. We are supporting our military dentists.

And finally you have issue with the CSDA sponsoring this. CSDA is not. Our political activities are done through our political action committees and are arm’s length processes. My email note was properly signed with my position as the Action Team Leader for the Congressman. We ARE using membership lists to invite members to attend at no cost to them! We hope to have members attend so as to give input to our elected officials. Once again, this is a no cost invitation.

My goal here is two-fold, one that you are convinced that none of your dues dollars were or will be used in any way for this or any of these types of activities. Two, that you realize why it is done and how important it is that we get involved. They say that in politics if you don't have a seat at the table you will get eaten for lunch.

ADPAC gets us a seat at the table. Now that you see how important it is that we participate in the process, may I send you an application so you can join ADPAC as a volunteer contributor too?

Sincerely,
Mark Desrosiers