

Nurse Advocacy Beyond Voting – Working on Political Campaigns

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Nurses can and should vote to exert their political advocacy in favor of candidates and issues that align with nursing values and beliefs. Yet nurses can express their political advocacy beyond voting by becoming more involved with political campaigns or by communicating and meeting with legislators. Since we are currently in a political campaign period, this is an article about how nurses can become more involved. In the following issue we will publish an article about how nurses can communicate and meet with the legislators who eventually become elected.

Providing Campaign Assistance

Nurses often work on campaigns through their affiliation with professional nursing organizations, political parties, community/neighborhood associations, or particular issues of importance. Nurses choose candidates whose values, beliefs, and priorities are closely aligned. Because nurses are rated as the most trusted profession, endorsement by a nurse or group of nurses can enhance the credibil-

ity of a candidate (ANA, 2024). There are a number of ways to assist in campaigns with varying time commitments.

Making phone calls on behalf of candidates

Political phone banking is a process of reaching out to voters via phone calls, recruiting them to canvas or to get out the vote. It is often carried out using call center software, commercial phone banks, or voluntary phone banks run by volunteers. This may be with a group, or done individually. With advanced software-based phone-banking tools, volunteers log into a system through their computers and make calls through a browser. Volunteers are provided training and a script. Volunteers' personal phone numbers are not revealed.

Canvassing

Canvassing is door-to-door campaigning on behalf of a particular candidate or an issue. Canvassing with an actual candidate provides uninterrupted time to learn more about the candidate and to educate them about nursing priorities.

Training and a map of the canvas area with targeted addresses is provided. Volunteers are also given materials to hand out to voters as well as a script.

Some nurses in Ohio have canvassed on behalf of nurse candidates with a theme of "These Nurses Make House Calls." Nurses from all over Ohio gathered on a pre-selected date. The events were picked up by the local press and brought more attention to the candidate.

Sending post cards

Many campaigns have pre-printed post cards to send to voters. Volunteers are provided with postcards, a suggested message, and an address list. Volunteers provide stamps and address and mail cards at their convenience. Post card parties held over Zoom are another strategy to bring people together to socialize and write post cards together. This same strategy is used by non-partisan organizations such as www.Voteforward.org to encourage voter turnout. Vote Forward provides address lists, pre-printed letters, and a suggested message.

Hosting house parties for candidates

House Parties provide a candidate the opportunity to engage directly with voters. It is also an opportunity to educate the candidate. Each campaign has its own suggested method for planning house parties.

Submitting op-eds or letters to the editor

Op-eds and letters to the editor are excellent ways for individuals, organizations, businesses, and institutions to articulate to the public a unique position on a particular issue or candidate. Newspapers

have policies to submit both op-eds and letters to the editor. Op-eds are longer than letters to the editor with most between 500-750 words (Short, 2022).

Contributing financially to candidates

All candidates need financial assistance in order to run for office. Most individuals do not have the personal funds to run an effective campaign, and thus must depend upon political contributions. An individual can contribute or commit to raising a certain amount of money by seeking smaller contributions for a specific candidate from other nurses, family or friends.

Running for Office

More nurses serving in legislator roles could advance nursing's agenda in the policy arena. Nurses supporting nurse candidates who share similar values and beliefs is a helpful strategy in achieving that goal. There are currently no nurses serving in the US Senate and three nurses serving in the US House. All three nurses are up for re-election this November.

Congresswoman Lauren Underwood D-IL-14 – www.underwoodforcongress.com is the first woman, person of color, and millennial to represent her community in Congress. Her campaign website is www.underwoodforcongress.com

Congresswoman Cori Bush D-MO-1-bush.house.gov is the first African American woman and nurse to represent Missouri. She has served her community as a nurse, ordained pastor, and community organizer. Her campaign website is www.coribush.org

Congresswoman Jen Kiggans R-VA-02- www.kiggins.house.gov was a helicopter pilot in the US Navy, completing two tours in the Persian Gulf. She used her GI (Government Issue) Bill benefits to go back to school and become a board-certified Adult Geriatric Primary Care Nurse Practitioner. Her campaign

website is <https://jenforcongress.com>

In Ohio, there are currently no nurses in the Ohio Senate. There are two nurses in the Ohio House of Representatives. Both are running for re-election.

State Representative Rachel Baker D-27- www.ohiohouse.gov/members is a nurse researcher serving in her first term. She lives in Anderson Township and represents several eastern suburbs of Cincinnati. She has introduced legislation related to adoption procedures, hospital violence, and other health care measures. Her campaign website is www.voterachelbaker.com

State Representative Jennifer Gross R-45- www.ohiohouse.gov/members is a Family Nurse Practitioner serving in her second term. She lives in West Chester and represents several communities surrounding West Chester. She has introduced legislation requiring schools to adopt a policy on over-the-counter drugs and granting the Ohio General Assembly exclusive authority to implement Issue 1 passed in 2023. Her campaign website is https://www.jenniferforrep.com/about_jennifer

Nurses who are considering running for office should become involved in their political party as a way of developing relationships with those who could be helpful. Serving in local political party offices is also a helpful strategy. Political parties also provide candidate schools.

Recognizing the need to equip nurses with the skills and resources to become successful political candidates, two Yale School of Nursing faculty members decided to do something about it. Kimberly Gordon and Lisa Summers established Healing Politics www.healingpolitics.org as a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization in 2021. The mission of the organization is to inspire, motivate, recruit, and train nurses to run for elected office up and down the ballot while building a culture of civic engagement within the profession. It is a non-parti-

san organization which has developed a three and a half day candidate training school for nurses and midwives in collaboration with Duke University Sanford School of Public Policy, Durham North Carolina (ANA, nd).

Gale Adcock, MSN, FNP-BC is a State Senator in the North Carolina General Assembly. She sums up the need for nurse advocacy beyond voting by saying "Here is what I know: nurses cannot expect an invitation to participate. Although lauded as 'health care heroes' by the public, the media, and employers, we are not automatically or routinely included where critical problems in health care are discussed. Because nurses make up the largest segment of the health care workforce, it might seem logical to include them when discussing the nursing shortage, safe staffing ratios, and workplace violence. But the politics of power is not built on logic; therefore, we must insert ourselves into the process. Influence is not reserved for the rich and powerful, but it is unattainable for the invisible and silent." (Adcock, 2024 p. 32) ■

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