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How to Start Connecting with Political Candidates

By: Nicole DiCroce, BSN, BS, RN

I've been a nurse for some time now. I love providing care for the people in my charge, and as a nurse leader, the people in my care are nurses and health professionals. Our political landscape is certainly a dynamic one, and it does affect our work. If you want to grow your reach in nursing advocacy, but are unsure where to start, here's a guide for how to begin engaging with political candidates.

Step One: Build Awareness

Knowledge is power! What are some issues you face in your profession as a nurse, and what are lawmakers addressing? If something is a pain point for you, it may be for your colleagues as well. Workplace safety and well-being, patient access to care, and staffing solutions may be good starting points. Educate yourself not only on key issues, but also how your healthcare industry works, if there are any relevant laws in our state, and how legislative structures impact us all.

What political offices touch your work? Learn who the political candidates are in your geographic area. Research their voting histories, learn their priorities related to healthcare, and discover the platforms shaping their campaigns.

Step Two: Become Comfortable with Advocacy

The NJSNA is a great launchpad for learning about issues affecting nurses in New Jersey. Joining professional organizations opens the door to colleagues you may have otherwise never met. Participate in these associations, particularly if they have an advocacy compo-

nent or group that can engage with political candidates or officers. NJSNA's political action committee, INPAC, was a great place to start for me! Subscribe to newsletters or attend seminars or workshops that teach political advocacy to nurses. As caregivers, we have innate familiarity with the concept of being an advocate; transitioning that to professional advocacy is a small pivot.

Practice talking points! Scripting, while awkward at first, can help your nerves when discussing the nursing profession's concerns with a candidate. Make it personal. We have moments that stick with us, that shaped our career paths. Use those when discussing policies to show how things affect your work and patient care to bring your concerns to life.

Step Three: Make Contact, Collaborate, and Stay Engaged

Attend public events, such as town halls, meet-and-greets, and fundraisers. Stick around after the event to introduce yourself, as a voter and as a nurse. Ask questions about any part of healthcare that interests you. Be direct, concise, respectful, and as non-partisan as possible. Patient care and nurse well-being should transcend party lines. Communicate and follow up, via email, on social media, or by requesting a meeting. Build the connection between yourself and the candidate. You may be able to educate them or provide insight into healthcare issues.

Bring a friend! For me, everything is more fun with a friend. Plus, it's a way to show political candidates that nurses are many and

our issues impact thousands. Engage with your employer for resources and support. Every nurse leader was once a novice nurse and may have advice to help you advocate. Perhaps your employer can host the candidate for more direct interactions or debates. Monitor the candidate's progress and stay in touch. Hold them accountable post-election; public officials work for us all! Stay bold, brave, and savvy, and then mentor those just stepping into the world of advocacy. ■



State of Protection panel discussion with Senator Andrew Zwicker, Fmr. Commissioner Heather Howard, Attorney General Matthew Platkin, and ACLU-NJ Director Amol Sinha.



Attending Steve Sweeney event with fellow INPAC member and Chair, Linda Hassler, and educator Stacey Rose.