

An inside look at CSEA's involvement in politics

From time to time, we hear from union members who think that we as a labor union have no business being involved in politics. Often, it's those who feel that our political endorsements go against their personal political leanings or beliefs.

We'd like to shed some light on why we absolutely MUST be involved in the political process, and how we make the difficult decisions on who we support. Contrary to what some believe, we don't just rubber stamp our endorsements to support any particular political party. We also understand that as a union made up of a diverse range of people with differing political views, we're never going to please everyone with our decisions.

So why get involved in politics?

As a union of mostly public service workers, whose bosses are ultimately elected officials, we need to play an active role in our political system, supporting elected officials who will best listen to our issues and concerns before making important decisions that directly impact our work and home lives. It matters for the contracts we negotiate, the conditions in our workplaces, the type of labor-management relationships we are able to build, and so much more.

There's an often-repeated phrase that's appropriate here: if you don't have a seat at the table, you're likely to end up on the menu. That's why we can't afford NOT to be involved in the political process. Especially when there are corporate CEOs and organized one-percenters pouring nearly unlimited money into funding anti-worker candidates who seek to outsource our jobs or diminish our benefits, so they can line their pockets even more. We have to fight back with our own political muscle. We may never be able to outspend the anti-worker forces, but we sure as hell can do our best to tap into our people power to get worker-friendly candidates elected.

And we don't just endorse Democrats. In fact, CSEA has a proud history of challenging that premise by endorsing many Republicans, especially at the local and statewide levels. We endorse by candidate, not party.

Making tough choices

So we know that we're not going to please everyone by making endorsements of one candidate over another, so why do we bother doing it? It's really quite simple... we have an obligation to oppose the anti-worker candidates for your own protection, and just as importantly, we want to build relationships with politicians who will support union members, in the good times and the bad.

When making decisions about who to support we look at many factors: who has a track record of supporting our issues in the past? Who has listened to our concerns and been willing to work with us? Who stands up for public services instead of privatization? Who promises to protect

our pensions and guarantee us retirement security? Who isn't looking to have workers shoulder higher health care burdens? Who aligns themselves with anti-worker interests? These are questions we believe are important to all union members, no matter what party they belong to.

Member input throughout the process

When we make our endorsement, we do so with input from members at all levels. We encourage members to be involved in their local Political Action Coalitions. We encourage activists to serve on our Regional and Statewide Political Action Committees. We ask candidates to fill out surveys explaining their positions on union issues. We occasionally survey or poll union members directly. No matter who we endorse, it's a member-driven process that always takes into consideration the thoughts of union members who choose to get involved.

That said, our union endorsement is just a recommendation. We're not telling you how to vote; rather, we're letting you know that we feel a union-endorsed candidate has earned our support and seal of approval. That doesn't mean that we expect them to vote with us on every issue. What we do expect is that they won't automatically oppose our issues, and they'll give us a fair opportunity to argue our side of the issues and consider our concerns before making the important decisions that impact our work and home lives.

We hope this article has helped you better understand why it's important to be involved politically and gives you some insight into how our endorsement process works. We urge anyone wishing to get more involved in union Political Action to reach out to their Region Political Action Coordinator for more information.

Region Political Action Coordinators:

Long Island Region 1:

Sue Castle, Coordinator - (631) 462 – 0030

Metropolitan Region 2:

Matthew D'Amico, Coordinator - (212) 406 – 2156

Southern Region 3:

Chris Ludlow, Coordinator - (845) 831 – 1000

Capital Region 4:

Bill Gustafson, Coordinator - (518) 782 – 4400

Central Region 5:

Josh Schick, Coordinator - (315) 433 – 0050

Western Region 6:

Chris Rackl, Coordinator - (716) 691 – 6555