

ON BEING POLITICAL



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"We . . . do not have government by the majority, we have government by the majority who participate."—Thomas Jefferson

When was the last time you sent an email or wrote a letter or made a telephone call to a person who represents you and your interests at the local, state, or national level? I hope you can answer that it was within the past year. Just think about it. There are so many issues at all of these levels that affect nursing practice — the how, the who, the what, the where, and the very circumstances of our practice. Just a few examples of issues on which nursing voices should be heard include workplace safety, support for increased mental health and substance abuse treatment facilities, access to primary care (instead of the ED), advanced practice nursing regulations or limitations, nurse staffing and ratios, telemedicine and its implications for nursing, and I could list so many, many more. We should not be silent!

It is enormously important to communicate with elected officials about legislation and/or regulation related to health care in general and nursing in particular — or any

other issue of interest to you. However, it may be even more important for nurses to become involved in making sure the "right people" are elected in the first place. Who are the "right people" you ask? The "right people" I'm referring to are the ones who share your personal beliefs, values, political philosophy and world view. I would hope they are people who share nursing's values as well.

In order to determine who the "right people" are for you, review candidates' background and past experience, voting record, campaign positions, priority issues, and plans if elected. Above all — don't be a "low-information voter"! Don't accept the 30- or 60-second sound bite without doing your own checking. Doing the work to be a "political nurse" is essential. If you find a candidate who shares your views and positions on issues you feel strongly about, you might consider donating time or money to that person's campaign.

I have heard far too many nurses say, "I'm not into politics," or "I'm just not a political person." This is a point of view nursing and health care cannot afford. We have expertise to share. If our voice isn't heard, someone else's will be. I think back to our nursing foremothers and their ability to influence health care policy decisions. They knew the facts, saw the need, collected the data (evidence), and spoke out — in other words . . . they were political. And they did this without even having the right to vote! In order to make our voices heard today, we need **every nurse** to be political! Decisions will be made — with or without our input. Collectively we can have a positive impact. Please remember Thomas Jefferson's wise words that I began this editorial with, "we have government by the majority *of those who participate*." Be political in whatever way is best for you — but participate!

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