

# Editorial

## **PAC is their name. Sops are their game.**

**P**olitics and health care should be kept apart, some say. Those who most frequently espouse this opinion, of course, are those who wield political power, and are therefore at risk of losing it.

Political and economic factors are the fundamental constituents, the building blocks if you like, of the health care decisions we all make. After all, decisions are made every day in dental offices around the world concerning whether or not, or how, to treat patients based on the political health care system's willingness, or the patient's ability, to pay for the treatment.

It is not possible, under any circumstances, to keep politics and health care apart. So, while politics and health care are inseparable and indivisible, one can only hope the politics is clean.

It is not surprising that an organization such as the American Dental Association should have formed the American Dental Political Action Committee (ADPAC). ADPAC is perhaps best described as a necessary bane.

According to the promotional brochure, ADPAC is "working to elect the type of public officials that are supportive of organized dentistry" and to "elect candidates who will listen to our concerns." Too bad the ADPAC brochure does not promote the goal of improved dental health care for the citizens of the United States.

Far too much money goes into the election of our public officials. And the providers of much of that money are the corporate, union, and trade association PACs, who are seeking to buy political influence and support.

Last year, Senator Jim Sasser, a Tennessee Democrat, was given \$ 10,000 by ADPAC, apparently to improve his understanding of dental issues. Or could it have been because he is a powerful and influential senator, the Chairman of the Senate Budget Committee? I assume Senator Sasser, and other politically influential senators, will once again receive major contributions from ADPAC, and many other PACs in 1990.

While I agree that, "It is critical that those who serve [in public office] understand how their decisions will

affect our profession," as the ADPAC brochure states, I do not believe that a \$ 10,000 sop is the way to do it. Will the \$ 10,000 increase the senators' understanding? Very doubtful. Will it influence a decision? Possibly.

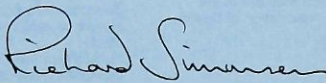
Do I think senators will be kinder to decisions affecting organized dentistry than they would be without a \$ 10,000 contribution? Sure. Will the American Dental Association be more able to get its point across with a senator after donating \$ 10,000 to the senator's job-security fund? Of course. One would have to be glassy-eyed, and empty-headed, to believe that the answer is anything but yes to these questions.

American politicians, as soon as they are elected, start thinking about raising money to finance reelection campaigns. It is estimated that an election to the US Senate in these times necessitates a senator's raising \$ 15,000 each week, for the 6-year term of service, to obtain adequate reelection funds. The PACs, with their sizable contributing power, are obviously a welcome source of funds for reelection accounts.

While politicians should be spending their time on matters of public service, they do, in fact, spend far too much time on the money chase for campaign funds, most of which comes from organized special-interest groups.

Political action committees should be eliminated from our political system. The American Dental Association has far better targets for funding than the deep pockets of money-hungry politicians whose ethical values are challenged by the headlong pursuit of reelection support. Influence peddling should not be a part of American politics, especially dental health care politics.

Political Action Committee is their name. Sops are their game. Keep it clean. Dentistry can do without.



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