

Analyze This!

Volume 3, Issue 4

April 2010

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Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past. Let us accept our own responsibility for the future.

-John F. Kennedy

Why you should get involved in political action:

- **Protect your job**
- **Preserve your healthcare**
- **Provide for your family**
- **Secure your pension**
- **Safeguard your work environment**
- **Prevent privatization**

GETTING INVOLVED IN THE UNION PART II: POLITICAL ACTION AND AFSCME

Making the personal choice of electing candidates that fit one's political views is a challenge-particularly for public employees. On one hand, no one wants to spend even more of their hard-earned salary on taxes during these difficult economic times. On the other hand, tax dollars fund the salaries of public employees and allow for wage increases and comprehensive benefit packages.

Regardless of one's political view, we all hope to elect the best candidate for the

job. The democratic process helps ensure that your tax dollars - and the funds for your salaries - are managed efficiently. AFSCME's political arm works to elect efficient, union-friendly candidates to ensure that AFSCME members get the most out of their tax dollars and the best compensation for their work.

This month's Analyze This! explains how to support union-friendly political candidates through volunteering, fundraising, and donations.

To find out more about AFSCME's political involvement, *Analyze This!* sat down with Council 40's Political Action Representative, Jason Sidener.

Analyze This! Hi Jason, thanks for meeting with us today. Can you explain what your job as the Political Action Representative entails?

Jason: I am the political person for Council 40. My job involves working with members to get involved in elections, and working with the candidates we support. During non-election times, I advocate for members who are having difficulty communicating with their elected officials.

Analyze This! Why should our members get involved?

Jason: Ultimately, all of the money that funds our members' wages and benefits comes from elected officials, whether it is from local budgets or transfers from state and federal budgets. All of this, in one way or another, pays members' salaries. On the local level, city, school, and county boards vote to approve contracts, budgets, and supervise the department heads that supervise the members. When members get involved, AFSCME is able to elect union-friendly candidates to these positions.

Analyze This! How can Council 40 members get involved in AFSCME's political activities?

Jason: Volunteering is critical, especially for those members that have the opportunity to take union-leave. Union-leave language varies widely across the state of Wisconsin. When a member takes union-leave, he or she spends a pre-specified number of work hours volunteering with Council 40. This is unpaid leave, and Council 40 subsidizes the employee's salary for that time. The places in the state where we have had the most success in electing union-friendly candidates are the same locations where local members can take significant leave time.



Analyze This!: What can members do if they are unable to take union-leave?

Jason: There is something to fit every member's availability, skill-set, and level of interest. Volunteers can make phone calls, drop literature, knock on doors, and help with mailings to support an endorsed candidate's election. In instances where a member is able to dedicate significant time to the campaign, he or she might work directly with the candidate and take on a more managerial role. These volunteers develop election strategy and build relationships with future elected officials.

Analyze This!: What are some success stories from the recent April election?

Jason: In Manitowoc County, 6 AFSCME members ran for the county board and five of them won their elections. Now, we have a pro-AFSCME majority on the board. This is especially important in Manitowoc County because our endorsed candidate for county executive did not win. The winning candidate has intentions to enact policies that would damage our members, such as privatizing the entire highway department. The pro-AFSCME county board majority allows us to mitigate potentially harmful policies.

In Dane County, we were able to maintain the pro-AFSCME majority on the county board. This is a huge success, and we would not have been able to elect this many union-friendly representatives without the help and support of our members. Pro-union political representation is a great source of power and security for our locals.

In the April elections, AFSCME endorsed 196 campaigns and won 64% of those races. Like I have said, AFSCME is active across the state to ensure that the voices of our members are heard.

Analyze This!: Who can an interested member contact in order to get involved?

Jason: Members can contact me, Jason Sidener (jsidener@afcme40.org) or their local take back staffer.

Analyze This!: Do you have any parting words?

Jason: Fall elections are coming up. AFSCME has endorsed Tom Barrett for Governor. We also have pro-union majorities in the State Senate and State Assembly to maintain. Remember that friendly faces are important in tough economic times. These people understand the value of our member's work to the public and the greater good of Wisconsin.

The PEOPLE Program

Public Employees Organized to Promote Legislative Equality, or PEOPLE, is an AFSCME international office that raises funds to support campaigns for labor-friendly candidates. PEOPLE is funded by contributions from AFSCME members, staff, and their family members. When a member donates through payroll deduction or direct contribution, money is collected by AFSCME International. AFSCME International then allocates funds for local political campaigns based on candidate endorsements and recommendations from local members. Additional funding is allocated by looking at "on the ground" needs as well as national legislative priorities and goals. In fact, because Wisconsin has the fifth largest membership in all of AFSCME, it is often a recipient of additional PEOPLE money.

PEOPLE committees screen candidates in order to determine which will receive AFSCME support in upcoming elections. These committee members are elected during PEOPLE's annual convention. All Council 40 members, however, are encouraged to get involved and attend their local PEOPLE committee candidate screenings.

Tammi Robinson, the PEOPLE Coordinator for the Midwest region, says of the program "Politics is a part of what we do. When you work in the civil service, you can hire or fire your supervisors. Politicians determine your wages and your wage increases. PEOPLE is outspent by corporate funds 15:1. The competition is tough. Imagine what we could accomplish if we had an even playing field."

Every member donation brings the union closer to reaching that goal of an even playing field. In addition to making a donation, you can get involved in the PEOPLE program by: (1) bargaining to include PEOPLE payroll deduction in your contract, (2) helping spread the word about the PEOPLE program to your co-workers, and (3) holding PEOPLE fundraisers. Contact Tammi at the AFSCME International office in Madison to learn more about how you can get involved in the PEOPLE program (608-836-6666).