

Are Politics Needed for Water Operations?

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Think you all know the answer...in every water system, either private or municipal owned, the everyday operational issues will occur (leaks, meter readings, power failures, lack of manpower, unhappy consumers, etc.). As operators, we all try to our best ability to overcome any issues and supply the best product at the most reasonable cost, making the end consumer as happy as possible, all while staying within EPA & DOH regulations. This is our job and our commitment. It happens every day, no holidays or weekends escape the flow of water or the regulations. Not even the politicians can stop this.

However, the one thing the political body has control of is money. Yes, the funds needed to do the repairs, the daily operation, and upgrades so water can flow uninterrupted and in regulated compliance every day. This would appear to be the area of difficulty.

Most politicians are not aware of the following:

- Required testing
- Required reporting
- Chemical dosages and cost
- Electric rates
- Cost of emergency repairs
- Upgrades
- Maintenance
- Cost of staying in compliance

These are only a few of the higher cost items of doing business as a water utility. Who is to blame? Us, the operators and supervisors. We all see the political entities latest craze for both small and large government is to make the parks and main streets pretty. Plant trees and flowers, host concerts and festivals in our towns and villages, all at a cost. This is all because the voters see these projects and they appreciate the looks of the community they live in, and you can't blame them. And the politicians love this to make the voters and public happy. Now we need to ask ourselves, would you have the same pretty village, town or community if the water system were on a boil water notice, or if there is no water in the pipes because of lack of volume? Sometimes we just need to sell ourselves and the importance of what we do.

Some suggestions to sell yourself are as follows. Advise the political board of what is done on a daily basis, and I mean every day. Let them know your job does not stop on Christmas or New Years, this will wake many of them up. Let them know what is required of you and your system by the DOH and EPA. Advise them of what minimum training is required. Advise them that the minimum is not always

enough. Let them know how much clerical work is required on a daily / monthly / yearly basis and that most operators do not have a secretary. This means most operators get their hands dirty doing what we do along with secretarial duties, lab technicians, public relations specialists, mechanics, and who knows what else. Looks a lot like most operators are jack-of-all-trades holding the knowledge and doing many different jobs and all for a salary of? Not usually enough. Ask for your elected officials to visit you and your facilities and show them what you do, what conditions you work in, and the importance of what you do. This may open some eyes.

So, back to the original question. Are politics needed for water operation? Unfortunately, yes. However, we can help make this a democracy, not a dictatorship, as long as you do your job, let others know what your job is, and make them aware of the importance of your job. ♠

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May 7-10, 2007
for the
**New York Rural
Water Association
28th Annual
Technical Conference**
at the
Saratoga Springs City Center

