



e.Forum Posit

POSIT: Board Endorsement of Political Candidates

It is important for a representative body like the SSVMS Board of Directors to exercise its authority to endorse the candidate for political office who most clearly reflects the views of the majority of our members.

Posit Background:

1. SSVMS has interviewed all candidates for the 10th Assembly District who are seeking election in 2008. The Society has always interviewed state wide candidates and made recommendations to the CMA's political action committee, CALPAC.
2. All candidates appeared to be knowledgeable and capable in assessing concerns of our profession.
3. SSVMS has never endorsed a candidate for public office. In 2002 this policy was revised to allow the Board to make such endorsements.
4. The board has been considering whether to endorse the candidate who is most well known to us. Some felt our professional organization should remain above election politics, in order to speak with authority about issues affecting medicine and health. They suggest political activity and endorsements are individual choices but not proper for SSVMS. Others felt that if the Society fails to participate in the election process we lose political relevance; no one fears a toothless dog. They suggest it is the Board's responsibility to lead, to risk, and to represent the views of the majority of members. Some felt that while it is good to have the option to endorse, it should be exercised very cautiously. In this instance they suggest endorsement is not prudent.

Results: 60 members agreed with the posit, while, 59 disagreed and 5 expressed no opinion. There were 29 comments from those who disagreed and 9 from those in agreement.

"This is an extremely important issue. There is no question that assisting legislators in their election can at times improve an organization's ability to gain that legislator's ear when issues arise. There is a larger issue, however, that troubles me greatly. Specifically, the CMA takes stands on many issues that are rather contentious. I agree that our organization should represent our interests when there is agreement, or at least a great deal of agreement, among the membership. All too often, however, our organization takes positions based not on overwhelming opinion of the membership but rather on the opinions of a majority of those in leadership positions. I for one think that such activity is unfortunate and should stop. There are few things more frustrating than to hear that my organization is lobbying for legislation that I and many other CMA members do not support. The choice of who to vote for is an extremely personal choice. If a candidate publicly opposed the CMA on multiple issues of great importance to our organization, then I would support opposition to such a candidate. In a field of many candidates with myriad pros and cons each, I think it unwise for the leadership of our organization to pick a candidate for official endorsement." - **Alexander Kon, MD**

"Endorsement of some candidates can be offensive to some members, which can cause serious divisions in the Society's membership. It would be better for the Board to notify the membership when there is a candidate who claims to strongly support the principals &

political endeavors of the Society & CMA, as well as those candidates, who do not. In this way the Board is representing all members of the Society rather than just some, whether a majority or not." - **Bryant Sheehy, MD**

"Even though I often disagree (with the board) this the fairest way to voice our opinions. However, sometimes you make some BIG mistakes, like supporting the Medical Care Foundation." - **Allen Galbreath, MD**

"You do not need to tell me for whom to vote. But it would be helpful after a knowledgeable exchange with candidates to tell the membership those things which are relevant to medicine from your interviews. You would not then be saying that the medical society endorses, but rather this is what you learned, (saying) 'make up your own minds'." - **David Ruderman, MD**

"I agree that the society should make recommendations and share reasons to help educate our members and give them more to think about. The political process is here to stay, and we must use it as much as possible to help our patients and protect our interests. Our opponents do it." - **John Osborn, MD**

"Since SSVMS members hold a wide range of views, from socialist to libertarian, I do not think that SSVMS endorsement is essential. The result of the interviews should be made available to members. However, if an endorsement is made, it must be for a candidate who supports the majority views of SSVMS, and a follow-up evaluation "report card" would be useful. In the past, a published article revealed that those candidates who received the most AMA support were least likely to support the AMA's positions on legislation. I think that those unhelpful politicians in California included Stark and Waxman." - **Lee Welter, MD**

"I don't think we should be publicly in politics. I want to serve democrats, republicans, Muslims, Vietnamese: all who come to my office for help. This is my calling. It doesn't matter how they vote; politics are not part of doctoring. I don't think we should endorse any candidates. It is fine to do interviews and provide information for voters on candidates' positions to help voters make up their own minds. But we should remain neutral and advocate only for patients. I think that divergent opinions simply reflect different opinions on how to accomplish the same goals anyway. No on politics because we are gentlemen!"

- **William G. Cushard, Jr., MD**

"Although ideally the medical society should remain "above election politics", undoubtedly other organizations are using the political system to their advantage. Unfortunately, sometimes you must "play within the rules of the game" so as to better serve the medical society's agenda and thus serve the medical community as well. Therefore, we need to do what we can to endorse politicians who share in the vision of the medical society."

- **Robert Madrigal, MD**

"We are a professional society and not a labor union. As the issue of Universal Medical Care matures and likely comes to fruition in the next few years, we do NOT want to position ourselves on one-side-or-the-other (or, with one-candidate-or-the-other). We want to offer our best advice for the population we serve within whatever system is adopted. Let's focus on issues rather than candidates."

- **Donald Lyman, MD**

"Given the limited choices, I must "Disagree", but I would not prohibit SSVMS from endorsements, (and) would argue that they should be done only rarely, and then very carefully. 1. Don't get involved unless the campaign is centered about a hot issue affecting medicine that most of us, and the candidate, support. 2. Don't back a loser against a probable winner just because the loser is "doc-friendly" You will only make the winner more "doc-angry". - **Jim Rybka, MD**

"I don't think that it is appropriate to endorse a specific candidate. However, I think that it is appropriate for the board to provide information about candidates with regards to how

they stand on issues that might affect our profession directly and let us individually decide whether a particular position on a subject would be enough to affect our choice. I'm sure most of us base our support of a candidate on many issues and not just the issue of medicine." - **Maynard Johnston, MD**

"I don't see how an endorsement by the SSVMS Board of Directors can "most clearly reflect the views of the majority of our members." All such an endorsement can reflect is the views of the majority of the members of the Board of Directors." - **Bill Peniston, MD**

"Perhaps we should just go ahead and declare ourselves a union and an extension of the Democratic Party. That is the course that our nursing colleagues have chosen to pursue. Personally, I believe that medicine is an asset that is bipartisan." - **David Gibson, MD**

"Too often the board doesn't necessarily reflect the opinion of the general membership."
- **Peter Carruth, MD**

"I disagree. We have Cal Pac at the STATE level." - **Kuldip Sandhu, MD**

"I agree with reservations." - **Harvey Wolkov, MD**

"I would like to think that there could still be some organizations that can float high above partisanship, in reality as well as in appearance. Endorsements of the type suggested could lead down the path toward accusations of placing partisanship over altruism and scientism." - **Alfredo Czerwinski, MD**

"This is a professional organization. The CMA expresses its political positions through CALPAC. We can invent a similar vehicle if desired. The California Nurses Association (CNA) has lost all credibility as a professional organization by becoming essentially a political union." - **James Affleck, MD**

"(It is) OK for board to poll its members and communicate the result to SSVMS members. Not OK for board to form an opinion and then announce it as the position of SSVMS."
- **J Robert Griffin, MD**

"As long as "All candidates appeared to be knowledgeable and capable in assessing concerns of our profession", I do not think we should endorse any one candidate. If there is an individual who would hurt our profession, then I think we should speak up."
- **Caroline Peck, MD**

"I feel the Medical Society should interview candidates to learn their positions on the medical, public health, and social issues which are important to our members. Candidate's strengths and weaknesses should be made known to members. However, the Medical Society should not presume to tell members which candidates they should support. We don't all agree on the way government should address medical issues such as medical insurance reform, licensing of non-physician providers, decriminalization of drug dependency, increasing regulation of air and water pollution, etc. Even if we did agree, there may be other non-medical issues at stake in an election that take precedence in members' decisions of which candidate to support." - **Robert Meagher, MD**

"I believe that the SSVMS Board of Directors should have the authority "to endorse the candidate for political office who most clearly reflects the views of the majority of our members". My concern is that the Board may be unable to determine the views of its members and in taking a political action could disenfranchise Medical Society members who may disagree with the action taken by the Board. Without assurance that the board will accurately represent the membership, I cannot support the proposal." - **Scottie Dogget, MD**

"I question if the board can truly speak for the majority of the members without an election." - **Gilbert Mandell, MD**

"My personal endorsement may not agree with the endorsement of SSVMS Board of Directors so I would not want my name attached to such an endorsement."

- **Sandra Lai, MD**

"I would not favor the Board of Directors choosing/endorsing a candidate on their own. I would favor them proposing endorsement/s to the members based on the issues and the result of their explorations. I think they could do the Society and/or its members a service by sharing what they have learned about the candidates and the issues. Individual members, unfortunately, may not have had the time and opportunity to explore the candidates and issues. If the membership then backs an endorsement that could possibly increase the organizations political 'relevance'. But even without the endorsement, by informing the membership of the issues at hand and how the candidates weigh in on those, the Society would be providing a very relevant service to the membership. I certainly would welcome that." - **Nancy Gilbert, MD**

"I think CMA should be taking a position on issues that deal with the medical profession. If we allow each Medical Society have a different position, we will look fractured and ineffective." - **John Tucker, MD**

"We have a responsibility to promote our political agenda when there are issues that are directly related to health such as smoking in public places, use of seat belts, etc. However, supporting one political candidate is a different matter. I doubt there will ever be one candidate that the majority of our membership would comfortably back. While (candidates) may support our healthcare agenda they may be supporting causes liberal or conservative that many find unacceptable. Let's keep our politics to the issues, not the candidate."

- **J. Rabinovitz, MD**

"I think it is more important to endorse policies and views that contribute to our mission and vision of improving the care (and the) professionalism of the care in the community. It is not the views of the members that should determine our support but the ability to advance our cause as a medical society." - **Thom Atkins, MD**

"In trying to do this, SSVMS is losing sight of its primary purpose. The reputation of the political arena at present is far from noble. Let those who strongly feel one way or another express their views through PACs and other organizations whose primary purpose is politics. The disclaimer at the end of this mailing is particularly interesting in its cautious phrasing and tone. That is how it should stay." - **Jose Ma. C. Leuterio, MD**

"Physicians have a great deal of influence and should use it carefully to advance public health and physician well being. If the chiropractors and other providers are endorsing candidates, I don't see any reason why we should not do the same."

- **Joanne Berkowitz, MD**

"While I think that we should have an opinion, we should voice that opinion through CalPac. It would be much more effective that way and preserves our image of being non-partisan." - **Sidney Scudder, MD**

"I agree that the board should be able to make an endorsement, but should do so with caution. If no one is outstanding, there is no need to take a *stand*."

- **Richard Gray, Jr. , MD**

"Endorsements of candidates for political office are appropriate, but only when one candidate is clearly superior, based on the consistency between his or her positions and those of the Soc (only) one political party. The Society should also back up its endorsements with a clear statement of why one candidate was found to be preferable to the other(s)." - **Patrick Romano, MD, MPH**