

The Enemy of Good

There is a phrase often bandied about in the realm of politics, attributed to different writers and thinkers over the years: Don't let perfect be the enemy of the good.

As we enter the heart of the general election season this phrase becomes more apropos, especially when considering candidates for various political offices – particularly the state legislative seats that have the potential to affect our members the most. And especially when those candidates being considered are asking for support, financial and otherwise.

As an industry, we obviously want to support candidates that share our values as they pertain to reducing regulatory burdens, or preventing new laws from being thrust upon us making it more difficult for us to do business and maintain profits in what is already a low-margin industry.

At the same time, we also want to support candidates who can effectively wield enough influence to be champions for our industry. In a state like California, finding such a candidate can sometimes be a challenge.

It is well known that Republicans are generally the party of business and Democrats are generally the party of higher taxes and more regulations.

In states with Republican controlled legislatures, the political calculus in choosing which candidates to support is pretty straight forward. Give to the highest ranking legislative leaders, and perhaps the party, and call it a day.

The calculus in California can be a lot more complicated, with Democrats here enjoying near two-thirds supermajorities in both houses of the Legislature. Fortunately, for the business community, there is a bloc of pro-business, moderate Democrats that will sometimes join with legislative Republicans to block anti-business legislation and support pro-business legislation.

The number of moderate Democrats and their degree of moderate can vary from issue to issue.

That said, even a moderate Democrat is still, at his or her core, a Democrat and will vote with their party a majority of the time. It is unrealistic to expect even the most moderate of Democrats to be with business a majority of the time.

When these moderates are not, or cannot, be with us it is always worth remembering that phrase: Don't let perfect be the enemy of the good. So what makes a good moderate Democrat in California?

A well-respected legislative staffer put it best when he explained that being a moderate Democrat isn't necessarily about voting with business 100 percent of the time, because as he noted, it's just impossible to do that as a Democrat in California.

What makes a good moderate is always having an open door to business interests, listening to their complaints and suggestions, as well as being willing to try and help. That help may not necessarily come in the form of a vote.

It may come in the form of an amendment that exempts, in our case, grocers from certain provisions of certain bills. Or it may come in the form of delayed implementation dates. Or it may come in the form of a "poison pill" amendment.

However, the help may come – it is help.

Granted it would be easier as an industry to deal with a majority Republican legislature, but in California that is extremely unlikely to happen for a very long time.

In the meantime, we do our best to support candidates that, though not perfect, are as good as we can get. And in politics, good can sometimes be enough to carry the day. ■



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