How to Respond to the Unpredictable: Be Continually Ready for Action

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The Trump administration will likely challenge us in ways we can only guess as we await the commencement of the 115th Congress and the Senatorial advise and consent process on Mr. Trump’s cabinet Secretarial nominees.

The AER Legislative Committee met on Wednesday, December 7, 2016 for a focused discussion on what we can anticipate under the upcoming Trump Administration. For the moment, things remain unpredictable, but federal funding cutbacks and/or shifts to the States and localities might be in the offing. Departments of Education and Labor policy shifts are reasonable to expect given the conservative nominees President-elect Trump has put forward for Secretaries of Education and Labor. They include, respectively, Betsy DeVos who in the past has championed the concept of “vouchers” that would enable parents to move their children out of public schools (see the Politico article at http://www.politico.com/story/2016/11/betsy-devos-education-secretary-trump-231804) and Andrew Puzder, who has been critical of minimum wage increases and who could conceivably roll back protections for workers including those with disabilities that he deems too expensive (see the NY Times article at <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/12/08/us/politics/andrew-puzder-labor-secretary-trump.html>). Moreover, we should brace ourselves for dissolution of the Affordable Care Act or at least an attempt to do so and the implications for colleagues and clients who do not have employer or otherwise government-sponsored health insurance.

Pat Leahy of the National Rehabilitation Association writes in her newsletter of December 13, 2016, “While no one really knows what to expect with a new administration, like with previous administrations (both Democrat and Republican), I anticipate a number of bills to be introduced or reintroduced which will call for the elimination of duplicative programs and consolidation of other programs spanning a wide spectrum including very possibly Social Security programs, education programs, employment programs, health care programs (including Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children’s Health Insurance Program [CHIP]), among others .”

As we await the work of the 115th Congress (commencing on January 3, 2017), we can already see signs of the scrambling and also the laying back that happens when a current administration winds down. Eight days after the election, for example, Mark Reichert, AFB Director of Public Policy, reported that the FCC has postponed rule-making on increasing the number of hours of described TV. He advises we take a “deep breath”, remember that this is usually what happens, prepare ourselves to work with the upcoming administration and Congress, and be prepared to respond to issues quickly and vociferously. He says, “(while) divided government leads to gridlock, single party control allows for lots of movement. And lots of movement means lots of dangerous possibilities, and yes friends, lots of potential opportunities.” Taking a “deep breath” also means recognizing that over the years our field has been supported (and occasionally betrayed) by both Democrats and Republicans, so while we should not prejudge to the point of paranoia, let’s remember to stay on guard.

Your Legislative Committee will be stepping up its attention and calls for action as things begin to unfold. We wish to advise all AER members that it is more important than ever to keep in touch with your federal and State representatives as issues evolve. Your voice must be heard. To that end, the easiest way to locate your representatives is via the League of Women Voters web site:

http://hq-salsa.wiredforchange.com/o/5950/getLocal.jsp?zip=20124&zip4=

Rebecca Sheffield, AFB Policy analyst, advises that this site enables you to enter your zip code and “get a list of all your elected officials, including contact information and email, from the U.S. President all the way down to county supervisors.”

Another (perhaps more accessible) site is:

https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials

Please look up your federal, State, and local representatives, store their e-mail addresses in a convenient place and be ready to write to them when an important issue is at hand. Your Legislative Committee, AER staff and subject matter experts and AER partners will keep you apprised of issues as they unfold.

Finally, it is more important than ever to let your views be known on the Hill. Congress members and their legislative staff are influenced by personal contact from their constituents. To that end, we urge you to join American Foundation for the Blind’s visit to the Hill on March 1, just prior to the AFB Leadership conference to defend the Cogswell-Macy Act which will help assure that children who are blind or have low-vision will get the proper level of braille and low-vision service they need to function optimally in school. To learn more about the Cogswell-Macy Act, go to

http://www.afb.org/info/get-connected/take-action/12

To join your colleagues on the Hill, write to AFB’s Rebecca Sheffield at rsheffield@afb.net to be added to an email update list for further details about the day's schedule.