

## Presidential Observations: *The Road Ahead*

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Legislation can be a good thing. Safety belt laws, child abuse regulations, The Clean Air Act and the Dram Shop Law have all been good rules implemented by our elected officials to protect our lifestyle. Our elected officials do indeed mandate some pretty good ideas for our American way of life. However, sometimes they miss the mark and go overboard. Not typically due to poor intentions, but rather misinformation and lack of education.

A few years back the macro nutrient phosphorous used for turf applications was pulled from the shelves and out of the hands of both the home owner and also responsible end users in the green industry (through fast action by the Minnesota Golf Association, golf courses were exempt). Although well intended to limit the negative impact upon large and small bodies of water, the legislature reacted more emotionally than scientifically. They passed into law a requirement that will do little if any to prevent the polluting and rapid aging of our ponds and lakes. As scientists we know that most of the contaminants are caused through the natural breakdown of organic matter or the misapplication of nutrients introduced through storm run-off sewers.

**Now we are stuck with a law that completely disregards scientific data** generated at the University of Minnesota. Information generated through funding from the Minnesota Turf and Grounds Foundation which indicates that healthy turf, grass fertilized with a balance of soil test indicated nutrients, is dense and will provide an optimum filter to capture impurities before they enter the environment through run off. So why were golf courses exempted from this poor legislation? Because they lobbied successfully with the MGA.

Coming down the road will be new laws intended to protect our state resources. More nutrient restrictions, regulations on plant protectants and perhaps even a more stringent limit on the water we have available today. Who is going to help educate our elected officials that we as an industry, an 8.25 billion dollar industry, will be impacted negatively should these mandates be placed willy-nilly?

Who will represent over 54,000 employees in the green industry to limit the regulation of our livelihoods?

Might I be so bold as to suggest we take the bull by the horns and guide our own destiny using the power of numbers, the numbers generated by the members of the Minnesota Turf and Grounds Foundation? Currently we are very successful at achieving our mission of supporting research at the University of Minnesota; kudos to each of the allied associations and their members for their part in promoting the Minnesota Green Industry. Isn't it time to turn that muscle into strength with which to prevent future regulations that could be negative?

**Our "association of allied associations"** represents a huge block of constituents, the squeaky wheels heard by potential and current legislatures. Together we can impact the outcome of well intended but poorly advised bills. We have already taken a first step in educating the House and Senate through the distribution in April of the 13-page Economic Impact Report and a letter indicating our willingness to inform them of our industry.

This initial thrust is a great door opener,

but I feel we need to become an even more prominent player on the Hill. To do this we focus internally and identify our strengths and desires, develop an advocate available during the legislative session and throughout the year and create position papers pertaining to our individual association and housed centrally for easy access.

**These goals will take time and energy.** Both are limited commodities but considering the challenges ahead, the task isn't too great for an industry as important as ours. At a meeting of Executive Representatives last fall several ideas were suggested to bring our allied association closer including the creation of a lobbyist position for our group. Due to our non-profit status this will be difficult, but not impossible.

The need to be heard at the Capitol demands that we pursue this type of advocacy. If we do not then we will surely be impacted by poor legislation implemented by well-meaning officials. It is my intent over the next two years to develop a stronger relationship between our allied associations to enhance our presence at the Capitol and add many voices when our issues need to be heard.



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