

LEGISLATIVE AWARENESS - A MUST TODAY

In recent months, various governments instrumentalities have attempted to enact legislation which could have had an adverse effect upon the operation of golf courses and their resultant quality. In several instances, attempts have been initiated which could have limited or gained the use of fertilizer on golf courses. Additionally, we have seen trial balloons flown concerning rationing of fuel, real estate taxation methods and increasingly harsh regulation of necessary pesticides.

Government, be it local, state, or federal, continues to be felt more and more on the golf course. The time when golf courses were seldom affected by such matters has long since passed, and now the superintendent and all other supervisors at a golf course must consider these laws with almost every action they take.

We may be an industry guilty of complacency and not mindful of serious inroads which have been made and others which some contemplate that could easily alter this picture if allowed to continue unaltered. Consider for example that most decisions made concerning golf are based upon the premise that golf courses as they have become known, will continue. Recent governmental attempts in some areas cast a dark shadow across all golf course, and in some instances, endanger their very existence.

When professional associations of "greenskeepers" were established some fifty years ago, the primary reason for their formation was to assist the members in scientific areas of turfgrass management through the dissemination of new information. While this reason still exists today, an important new area is that of being in a position to react to potential government actions.

Graphic examples of cooperation between professional associations and governmental bodies can be found daily. Within the golf course superintendent's profession, there are several excellent examples of how a united group can insure that its interests are represented and considered prior to final action. First at the federal level and more recently at the state level. Massachusetts and Michigan for example, some legislators proposed the banning of non-farm fertilizer usage. While

individual or local interest was first aroused, this was closely followed by organizational efforts to present information to legislators which was vital to a complete and thorough understanding of the problems which would follow such a ban. Fortunately, we can say today that these federal and state proposals were permitted to die without moving beyond the committee level. However, this is not to say that further attempts by these or other governmental bodies will not be forthcoming, nor can we afford to become relaxed on the issue. Unfortunately, the golf superintendent's interests may not always receive the mindful considerations they deserve by the lawmakers.

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) made determined efforts on the Massachusetts and Michigan fertilizer bills and on a Wisconsin pesticide bill by advising the chapters in those states of those proposals, followed by suggested actions and/or GCSAA position information. Superintendents in those states acted in unison through a letter writing campaign and in offering testimony to support their concerns.

This is not a totally new area of action for GCSAA, with it having given testimony, concerning pension reform legislation, as well as in dealing with the Environmental Protection Agency; however, involvement in the state level legislation is relatively new and caution must be taken to insure that counter-productive measures are not permitted through a conflict of actions by the state and national organizations. Neither should GCSAA attempt to supersede the chapter's prerogatives in state level actions, because the impetus must remain at the local level where those who will be most directly affected will have the greatest input. GCSAA's intended posture is that of acting as a hot-line to disperse information and to serve as a reservoir of resource information and prepare nationwide position papers.

Because more and more legislation is of concern to golf courses and historically it has been demonstrated that legislative actions are duplicated from the local and state levels to the national level and vice versa, a seemingly minor item of legislation may soon become so significant that it is affecting the profession nationwide. Additionally, a piece of legislation may appear to be insignificant at the time of passage and later, through interpretations and enforcement policies, become of tremendous import to the profession and the superintendent's ability to perform his required tasks.

Based upon these trends and historically documented cases, each member of the chapter must be on the alert for legislative developments within his geographic area and report to the chapter. Next, the chapter must determine if the proposal could be harmful or helpful and what would be the best approach to the matter. If the chapter feels this development is of a considerable magnitude or if possible assistance is desired, they could report the item to the GCSAA office or headquarters personnel. In some instances, GCSAA may advise chapters of impending legislation or seek the assistance of persons within the chapters to represent the national organization at the local level.

Individual superintendents may not be able to be aware of all legislation which could affect them, nor would they always be able to bring to bear the impact an organized effort would. However, it is the individual superintendent who must bring these matters to the attention of the organization so that the appropriate actions can be taken. This effect could become even broad based if a course's golfers could be encouraged to become involved to the extent of reporting items of interest to their superintendent.

We can ill afford to be legislated out of existence and fortunately through our professional association, we can position ourselves to insure that our interests are represented on all times of legislation which could negatively or positively effect our ability to provide the type of conditions that today's golfers have learned to expect and appreciate.

Preceding article from May, 1975 A Patch of Green