



For The Sake of Fairness, Affiliation Agreement Between Chapters and GCSAA Needs to be Changed

By Monroe S. Miller

There has never been any question from me that affiliation between state golf course superintendent associations and the national association should exist - as it has since the 1930s. There is value in solidarity on issues that affect all of us, communication among the various groups will always be important, and there is lobbying to be done on the national level that affects all states.

My observation has been, however, that most problems faced by golf course superintendents are local problems. And, as the old saw goes, local problems require local solutions. GCSAA will never be part of that scene, but local chapters always will be. And the one way street, which runs to Lawrence, Kansas in the form of the affiliation agreement on the table, will not improve a chapter's ability to help its members with those local (state) issues.

I wonder how many members of the WGCSA have actually read the document. Has it been made available to everyone to study before we debate it and vote on whether or not to affiliate? It should be required reading for all of us. I predict that if every member of the WGCSA reads it and thinks about its implications, there will be more questions than answers as a result.

I have read this oppressive document, and some suggestions I think are essential for improving it follow. It comes down to three specific items.

1. The dual membership requirement is totally unfair. It matters little to require a national member to join a state chapter — the bone thrown as compromise by the GCSAA to chapters — because it generally costs little to join a state chapter. Such a requirement is the prerogative of the

national organization. The fact that state dues are affordable to a large number of golf course superintendents is a key point. Dual membership will without a doubt lead to segregation of golf course superintendents based on economics. I wish someone with some courage of conviction would explain the good of such a situation. It is, in a moral sense to many of us, wrong to deny a golf course superintendent membership in his own state chapter.

To make foolish statements that even a man with a meager salary of \$20,000 a year can afford to pay from his own pocket only points out how elitist and selfish this is.

I called the U.S. Department of Labor office in Madison and found out that a person with that salary and three kids is officially at the poverty level. National dues may only be 1.5% of his gross pay, but that is still too much for a man in such circumstances. He should not be denied state membership for any reason.

Paul McGinnis wrote in a letter to me this question: would Wisconsin be willing to match GCSAA in a dues cut to make the national affordable? That is a chapter decision, but I would ask why would we? We didn't make this proposal, GCSAA did. Since GCSAA is inflicting this mandate, that organization should find and fund solutions to those less prosperous among us. And that program should accommodate all low budget courses — 9-hole and 18-hole courses.

2. Section VI.B.3. is must reading before voting. It spells out grounds for probation, suspension or revocation of affiliated status. Item three states you can get the boot if the chapter and/or its officers, directors or employees knowingly and willfully infringe upon or impugn the objectives, reputation and/or goodwill of GCSAA and/or its officers, directors and employees. What does this mean? What are its implications? I am going to ask an attorney friend of

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mine for his interpretation, which I will share next issue. It appears to me to say that no matter what GCSAA does, you WILL bite your tongue. Fat chance.

Let's take an extreme, hypothetical example. For the sake of discussion, assume a member of GCSAA found out that GCSAA has more money in the officers and directors expense budget — plane tickets, hotel rooms, rental cars, clothes, meals, entertainment, etc. — than there is in the GCSAA national turf-grass research budget. Remember, this is only a wild hypothetical case. There would be no hint of any misappropriation, just a question of priority.

I would guess a poll of GCSAA members would conclude this to be somewhat scandalous. Research should be a top consideration of an organization that exists to improve the lot of its members. As a result, a chapter publication features an editorial comment by one of its mem-

bers that questions the wisdom of such a spending priority. Only facts are presented. Would this editorial "impugn" anybody?

I hope not, or we've just lost all sense of right and wrong in our national association. Standing up to inspection, answering tough questions forthrightly, and defending decisions that are made should be a basic duty of elected officials and employees. Scrutiny by members should be encouraged — it leads to faith and trust and confidence in the organization's leaders and programs. It is an element of accountability.

What is there to hide that this language needs to be included? What are people who crafted this document afraid of? What drives such an attitude — insecurity? Thin skin? Lack of conviction?

There would be wisdom in eliminating this totally unnecessary section. Or, using simple, straight forward language, explain the thinking behind it.

Oh, and there is one more thought here: did the authors of this affiliation document ever hear of the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution? GCSAA should encourage free speech and comment, not stifle it.

3. Finally, I am really concerned about the potential of large chapters exerting too much influence and control over smaller ones like Wisconsin. A half dozen large chapters can control the national, change the by-laws to suit them (delegate voting, you know), and diminish our individuality.

As soon as you say "don't worry about it," something will happen we will regret.

So, what is the conclusion? The chapter relations committee will hopefully use reason, fairness and common sense as their guide and change the affiliation agreement so that affiliation can be accommodated by more chapters.

After all, we are all in this business together. ♣



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