

The Making of Sausage

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After the completion of dental school, general practice residency, or specialty training, most of us settle into a private practice of dentistry. At that point, we become comfortable in what we do for a living. Our expertise increases with experience; we can do what we like to do in dentistry, and not do what we do not like. We get to treat many wonderful patients, we make a comfortable living, and we have fun at work. Life is good.

For many of us this is idyllic. The comfort level is good, as is the control of our environment. For others, it is possible we reach a state of ennui. We begin to wonder if there is anything else to do. Can we continue to practice for the rest of our lives? Are we capable of anything else besides dentistry as a career? Can we contribute or give back in any other manner? Many of us go through similar introspective analysis from time to time.

There are numerous ways we can show our “stuff” outside the office. Many of us get involved in community service in the delivery of health care to underserved groups. For others, church and community service activities, or social involvement allow us to express ourselves in different venues. Those of us who are deeply involved in dental politics are yet another group trying to contribute at a different level.



Otto von Bismarck has been quoted as saying “Laws are like sausage, it is better not to see them being made.”

The Walter Mitty in me says I feel there might be more to life than practicing dentistry. My fantasy is to be a legislator in the state assembly or senate. Can you imagine the responsibility and power these individuals possess? They govern our state, supposedly between the sixth and 10th largest economy in the world, as they make the laws we use to guide our lives. The ability to impact the people of our state and the direction they can provide is impressive. The committees to hear proposed legislation, testimony, and debate are all part of a process that makes this a democracy. Even party politics, which at times can be a difficult thing, can have positive rewards when it is perceived as the correct approach to a matter. What a way to have legacy in this world.

I would like to be a legislator. I would not like to become a legislator. Otto von Bismarck said “Laws are like sausage, it is better not to see them being made.” This analogy can be carried over to the process of getting elected to a position. Running

for office is most difficult. The people who do this have to deal with constant fund raising by attending luncheons, dinners, and cocktail parties. You must be vigilant and watch every word you say as you could be misquoted. Having to deal with special interest groups, especially when you disagree with their cause, has to be tedious. You are constantly in the public eye and may find it difficult to relax even in your own community. Couple this with the need to run for re-election on a regular basis and the increasing tendencies for “dirty” political campaigns, and one can understand the negative aspects of the election process.

We are fortunate to have colleagues who have accepted that challenge and became legislators. All of us know of the accomplishments of Sen. Sam Aanes-tad and Assemblyman Bill Emmerson. They have represented Californians and dentistry well. There are others, such as Sam Wakim, who seek a seat in state government in a contemporary election. Some dentists are achieving success at the

local level in municipal governments and on school boards with the possibility they can advance their political careers in time.

At a recent American Dental Association legislative leadership conference, we mourned the recent passing of Charlie Norwood, a dentist who represented all of us well in Congress. Several senators and representatives encouraged us to be involved nationally to have input into our profession.

We need to support those who can rise to this level of participation. It is important to encourage more individuals who have the desire to be involved with politics, not only at the association level, but also in local, state, and national positions. Offer them financial help as you can, for campaigning is impressively costly. Vote for them if you are in their district. Hosting coffees and other receptions will be beneficial. Helping in their campaign offices stuffing envelopes, making telephone calls, and distributing literature are all part of the workload that needs to be completed.

Those of us who become legislators are people who have given up their dental practices to move to a more global level of politics. They do well for themselves and they do well for dentistry. They serve dentistry well and show dentists can contribute back to the community. We need to continue to support such individuals and we will all be better served by doing so. I will never become a legislator, and that might be a good thing. But I am grateful that we have many friends who represent our interests well. ■■■■

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