

Taking the long view

by Paul Byrd, Esquire
ATLA President

Many of us rarely consider how the ATLA donation we make today impacts the work we do for our clients tomorrow — or next year for that matter. But having served on the Board of Governors, Executive Committee, and now as President, I have been able to develop a much clearer picture of our overall work.

First of all, money donated each year serves as a building block for subsequent year's efforts. One very apparent example is the situation created by term limits in our state, which created the need for a new legislative strategy.

Prior to term limits, legislators could serve in office for many years, sometimes decades. Relationships with legislators had time to develop and grow. Trust could be built and sustained for quite some time. However, when term limits were created, everything changed. Some argue for the good, others for the not so good. Either way, they have created an entirely new dynamic.

It became readily apparent after the 2003 legislative session that ATLA had to come up with new strategies for creating relationships with legislators who would be in office for a short time. They had to develop that same level of trust in a much smaller time frame.

From the legislator's point of view, it has become more difficult to find that trusted advice. In past sessions, the seasoned veteran lawmakers could "show them the ropes" and help them navigate their way. But now, the most seasoned

lawmakers had only been in office themselves for a handful of years.

To help create these new relationships and become a trusted source of information and advice, ATLA created the position of Government Liaison in 2003, in addition to implementing other legislative strategies and goals.

It became important to organize our lobbying efforts, but even more so to develop the relationships and knowledge of our ATLA members. If the legislative candidates were going to change regularly, we needed to tap a major resource that had substance and consistency — our own ATLA members. With a state-wide membership already in place, we had to communicate, educate, and motivate them to find out who the new candidates were going to be in each new legislative election cycle.

Following the 2003 legislative session, ATLA's leadership realized that we had to have someone to organize and educate our members on the need to learn who was running for office. If an ATLA member already had a relationship and had the trust of a candidate for the legislature, then that became as close as we could get to what was available before term limits.

In the end, our greatest asset was (and is now) our own ATLA members.

I have seen our ATLA staff and volunteers work diligently to educate our members to this effort. I have also seen them work diligently to increase membership levels. The more members we have, the better our chances for someone

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IMPACT & MEMBERSHIP

Your time and effort paid off

by Christopher Heil, Esquire
ATLA President Elect and IMPACT Chair

As I look back over the past year, I'm proud of the support each and every one of you provided to IMPACT, both in terms of financial contributions (which are always needed) but also in terms of the time and effort you put in to meet with candidates and current legislators. It is this dedication and support that has allowed us to have a strong voice in the legislature, and the ears to hear it. We were once again

extremely successful in assisting the candidates who support the jury trial and access to justice. I also want to extend a special thanks to the ATLA staff, especially Matthew Hass, for their hard work.

As I write this article, the 2009 legislative session has just begun. I don't know what the outcome will be, but I believe that because of our efforts this past year, tort reform will have strong opposition if it is proposed. The next President-elect, Tre Kitchens, will be calling on you for your support in the upcoming months, and I know you will give him all that you can. •