

ATLA Makes an IMPACT in Arkansas's Elections

by Christopher Heil, Esquire
ATLA President Elect and IMPACT Chair

Election season has finally come to an end, and while the presidential election consumed the majority of the spotlight, there were several important Arkansas races in which ATLA played a strong role.

ATLA was very involved in Arkansas's political process from the beginning. Providing candidates and potential candidates with information about our issues in some cases began before they even filed to run. This year, ATLA staff began by meeting with incumbents and potential challengers for several seats in Arkansas's General Assembly. By learning more about their views on issues of interest to ATLA members, we were able to make judgments about who would receive support from our political action committee, IMPACT.

For the campaign, ATLA chose to support 23 state legislative candidates. Among those were incumbent representatives and senators who have shown their support for ATLA's issues in the past, along with several new faces who are poised to become strong allies for Arkansas attorneys. Staff members spent a great amount of time meeting with these candidates and discussing issues that are important to our profession. It was these discussions that led to a recommendation of support during the election.

In the end, candidates supported by ATLA did very well, winning 16 of the 23 races. Of those, several have close ties to our organization. Two of the newly elected representatives from Little Rock, John Edwards and Darrin Williams, are both ATLA members, along with former state Rep. David Johnson, also of Little Rock, who traded in his Representative title for Senator. A sincere congratulations goes out to these ATLA members. They are sure to be excellent representatives of our profession and trusted allies on important issues.

Other candidates supported by IMPACT also had successful campaigns. Incumbent state representatives that were re-elected include Rep. David "Bubba" Powers of Hope, Rep. Clark Hall of

Marvell, Rep. Fred Allen and Rep. Wilhelmina Lewellen both of Little Rock and Rep. Jim House of Fayetteville. The most recent winner of ATLA's Consumer Advocate Award, Rep. Steve Breedlove of Ft. Smith also won his bid for re-election.

A host of new faces will join these incumbents in the House of Representatives. Newly elected state representatives supported by ATLA include Tiffany Rogers of Stuttgart, Barbara Nix of Benton, Robert Dale of Dover, J.R. Rogers of Walnut Ridge, and Bryan King of Berryville. Long time ATLA member Jim Nickels of Sherwood was also elected to his first term in the House.



*Paul Byrd, (right)
ATLA President,
and Chris Heil,
ATLA President Elect
and IMPACT Chair*

ATLA congratulates the winners of these elections and looks forward to a successful working relationship with each of them in the 2009 session.

Although much of our attention was on the candidate races this year, there was one ballot issue that is of special importance to ATLA's work. Amendment 2, which was not expected to

pass given Arkansas's historical distaste for bureaucracy, did succeed. The Amendment calls for a legislative session to be held on even numbered years in addition to the current odd numbered year sessions. These sessions are described as "budget only", however, with a two-thirds majority vote, lawmakers can suspend the rules and introduce legislation just as they would in a regular session. ATLA will be vigilant in monitoring these sessions in the same manner as regular sessions to ensure that potentially harmful legislation is addressed quickly.

Given the overriding theme of "change" in this election, it appears that Arkansas's political landscape remains relatively unchanged. It is important that we not allow ourselves to become complacent due to the number of recognizable faces in the legislature, which is why you can rest assured knowing that even with the campaigns ending, ATLA remains ever vigilant in preparing for the upcoming session. Our goal remains to serve as the best and most accurate source of legal information and advice to Arkansas's lawmakers. •