

# Association **TRENDS**™

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## Associations, Congress, the federal government and 2017 - a busy year

**Do your homework, there's a lot of opportunity out there to make change**

By **John Chwat** | 01/05/2017



Beyond the headlines, trade and professional associations across the U.S. are preparing for a very busy 2017 with the new 115th Congress to start Jan. 3 and a new administration taking over after the Inauguration on Jan. 20. Leadership in the Congress and the future White House has indicated a "front loaded" first six months with issues, legislation, actions on regulations and policy after the State of Union (February thru July 2017) until the start of the August recess in Congress. Associations need to do their homework on targets for influence and presenting 2017 top priority issues to the right people and the right time. The past two months have seen many association "retreats" and positioning on what issues to present to the President-elect Trump transition and to leaders in Congress. Issues "homework" for association government relations includes:

- Making a list (and develop strategies to meet with and present agendas) of all officials in top positions within the federal departments and agencies that impact the association. Follow these officials (and their deputies and assistant deputies) as more than 3,600 political appointments by the new White House will begin in the New Year. Many of these below-the-Cabinet-level appointments will be announced throughout the early part of 2017. Transition with these officials will have tremendous impact on all issues.
- Making a list of new leadership in Congress with their new staffs relating to the association priorities. Meet with these officials and staffs, either in Washington or in their state or district offices as soon as possible to inform, present and support your association priorities. All leadership staffs will embark early on in the year to set agendas for first session.
- Engage with the "freshman" representatives and senators coming into the Congress, whether in Washington or their districts. They need association "education."

- Finally, do not forget your allied and supportive association “friends’ on joint issues. They, too, have had changes of staff, officials and leadership going into 2017, and will make great coalition partners in convincing Congress and the White House to support your priorities.

A key action item is adapting to changes in all committees and subcommittees of the Congress - what will the new chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, R-N.J., and his staff bring? Or the new chair of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, Rep. Virginia Foxx, R-N.C., on education and labor issues? Other leaders have been slowly emerging but the total membership of all committees and subcommittees will be assigned and announced early in 2017 and these will form the basis of you priority issue presentations for 2017.

Association issues depend in large part of priorities set and interests established. However, for 2017, this poses a new opportunity that many associations might want to take advantage of in the coming months. No transition in the past (aside from Carter-Reagan and perhaps Hoover-Roosevelt) has offered such a dynamic change in policy and direction in the nation’s capital. Here are some suggestions:

- Make lists and rank federal regulations imposed on the association members the past eight or more years, and see if there are opportunities to revise or repeal these?
- Review legislative priorities that may be able to be “moved” forward with the new leadership. New approaches to issues.
- In the next four years, Congress will assert its “power” back from a more aggressive executive branch. Much activity and funding may devolve to state governments. How will these changes impact your association?

Finally, go beyond the headlines. See association issues as opportunities, such as revision of the tax code and impact on exempt or nonprofits; repeal or replacement of the ACA (“Obamacare”) offers new opportunities for association health plans; changes in Labor Department overtime rules, and lobbying reforms that could impact associations. The list is endless, but are you prepared for the changes to come?

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