

Where Does Our PABAR-PAC Money Go, Anyway?

By William P. Carlucci



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As many PBA members know, Immediate Past President Andrew Susko honored and challenged me in June of 2007 to chair our PBA Political Action Committee (PABAR-PAC).

I was disappointed (but not shocked) to learn that our average annual PAC contribution at that time was less than \$1 per week. I quickly came to understand why our PABAR-PAC was ranked so low (No. 32) among Pennsylvania political action committees during the 2005-06 election cycle. Although every contribution helps, I was determined not to allow the lawyers of Pennsylvania to finish in 32nd place. Our members and the clients we serve deserve better.

Within a few weeks after I began my term as chair, the PABAR-PAC Board of Directors established the Capitol Club. PBA members who contribute or pledge at least \$250 annually are recognized as Silver members of the Capitol Club. Those who contribute or pledge at least \$500 annually are recognized as Gold members. Those who contribute or pledge at least \$1,000 are recognized as Platinum members. I am proud to announce that in its first six months of existence our Capitol Club attracted 131 members.

As I travel across our vast commonwealth (again), encouraging members to join our Capitol Club, I seem to draw one question more than any other: "Just where does our PAC money go?" The question is very reasonable, since most of our members are never charged with the task of budgeting scarce dollars in support of many elected representatives. I will use this

short space to explain how your PABAR-PAC board does exactly that.

First, the money is not used to "buy votes." It is sad to think that any educated person seriously believes that our Legislature is for sale. It is not. Rather, PABAR-PAC support is given to nearly all members of our Legislature, on a bipartisan basis. Each member of the state House of Representatives and state Senate was elected and must be periodically re-elected. They must deliver the message of their good work to constituents through television and radio ads, newsletters, mailings and the like. All of that costs money. By making modest contributions to legislators, the PBA helps them maintain their careers of public service. All that we ask in return is that we are given serious consideration when we speak on behalf of the 29,000-plus women and men who are the PBA.

Second, the money is not directly tied to any one message. Some of our members believe (foolishly, in my opinion) that PAC dollars are used to influence votes on "special" issues such as joint and several liability or civil rights issues. PAC support is never tied to any issue or to any vote. Financial support of our elected representatives does not guarantee that we will always get our way. It may help, however, to ensure that our members always have their say.

Third, PABAR-PAC support is bipartisan. Neither justice nor reason is the province of any one political party. Most nonattorney members of the House receive \$500 per election cycle, while most attorney members receive \$750. Most

nonattorney members of the Senate receive \$1,000 per election cycle, while most attorney members receive \$1,500. A handful of our “enemies” receive nothing, while a few of our “friends” receive a little more. House and Senate leaders receive an additional sum in recognition of their leadership. All in all, contributions are spread very evenly between the two major political parties and very evenly across the commonwealth (based upon the number of legislators).

In fact, I contend that our contributions are shared a little too evenly. Most House and Senate members are “with us” on some issues and not on others. A few, like Rep. Kathy Manderino and Sen. Stewart Greenleaf, are real heroes. Because they work tirelessly on behalf of the rule of law, both have received our PBA President’s Award. Unfortunately, we do not yet have sufficient PAC funds to offer them the financial support they deserve. As our Capitol Club grows, I hope that future PAC chairs can correct that imbalance.

Please do not wait to be asked to make a leadership contribution. You can become a member of the Capitol Club immediately. Please send your check for \$250, \$500 or \$1,000 today to PABAR-PAC, Pennsylvania Bar Association, 100 South Street, P.O. Box 186, Harrisburg, Pa. 17108-0186. You can also make credit card contributions on the PBA’s Web site, www.pabar.org, by clicking on the Legislative News section and selecting the PABAR-PAC menu option. Credit card contributions can be made on a one-time basis or in installments of \$25, \$50 or \$100, which will be charged to your

card each month. Please contact Legislative Coordinator Lauren Brinjac at 1-800-932-0311, Ext. 2207, or via e-mail at lauren.brinjac@pabar.org if you have any questions or concerns regarding your contribution. Remember, the contribution must be personal; it cannot come from a corporate account.

Many lawyers are reluctant to engage directly in our political process. Unlike the attorneys who founded this republic, most of us have become comfortable in the mistaken belief that liberty is a spectator sport. For over 200 years, lawyers have pioneered the concept of equal justice and a government of laws, not men. In that effort they sometimes sacrificed their careers, their homes and even their lives.

I am only asking you for money. ☪

Bill Carlucci, chair of the PABAR-PAC, served as PBA president in 2005-06. He is a partner in the Williamsport law firm of Elion, Wayne, Grieco, Carlucci, Shipman & Irwin P.C. Contributions by check to the PABAR-PAC should be mailed to the PBA, 100 South Street, P.O. Box 186, Harrisburg, Pa. 17108-0186. For information on the PBA legislative program, call 1-800-932-0311, Ext. 2232, or e-mail Nevin Mindlin at nevin.mindlin@pabar.org.

