

Why Advocacy Matters



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Over the past 11 years, Robert Broome, director of governmental affairs for the Atlanta Board of REALTORS® and the Atlanta Commercial Board of REALTORS®, has championed the REALTOR® legislative and regulatory agenda. His twin passions for REALTOR® issues and politics have threaded themselves through his career as a GAD (formerly of the Tennessee Association of REALTORS®), a contract lobbyist, a public relations consultant, and a political consultant.

Even before he became a lobbyist, issues that affect REALTORS® were at the forefront of Broome’s agenda. In his four years as an analyst for the Research Division of the Tennessee House of Representatives, Broome worked closely with the House leadership on a wide variety of issues, such as business taxation, telecommunications, annexation and land use, and tax reform. In 2012 Broome will be the vice chair of NAR’s government affairs directors’ group.

REALTOR® AE asked this GAD, known for his ability to find innovative ways to solve complex problems facing the REALTOR® organization, why he believes advocacy is such an important focus for REALTORS® today.

Q. Why do you think the political involvement of local associations is so important today, and going forward? Political involvement is important because government actions—especially at the local level—impact our members’ bottom line, regardless of whether they are agents or brokers, residential or commercial, part-time or full-time.

The REALTOR® Party Initiative is critical because political battles are seldom won by ragtag mobs. Rather, they are won by the group that is best-equipped, acts under a distinct and shared will, and moves as a highly organized team toward a common goal. The REALTOR® Party Initiative is all about making sure we have the tools necessary to win these battles.

We must remind members that political battles are part of a war that never ends. There is no armistice, end zone, or last station. As long as there is money being made in real estate, our industry is a target.

Q. What do you think is the key political challenge facing the REALTOR® organization today?

Our biggest challenge is how to win the debate over the very nature of government’s involvement in pro-

moting the virtue and value of home ownership.

Opinion leaders on both ends of the political spectrum call for a reduced or eliminated role of government on this issue. The extreme left wants to end home ownership tax incentives to pay for rental housing subsidies or just raise revenue in general. The extreme right wants to abolish programs and incentives in the name of free markets, smaller government, and reduced spending.

Most governing takes place between these extremes, but the increasing polarization of the political parties is eroding the middle ground. REALTORS® must stay focused on the task of building the REALTOR® party, rather than advancing some other partisan agenda.

Q. What is the most powerful motivator for getting REALTORS® to become involved in advocacy or politics?

In my experience, financial consequence is the most powerful political motivator. Local boards and state associations should strive to frame policy issues in monetary terms. For example, we stopped the City of Atlanta from requiring agents to obtain a business license and remit gross receipts taxes. That sounds great, but it becomes more meaningful to REALTORS® when you tell your agent members that this political victory saves them over \$300 every year.

Q. What has been your biggest political or advocacy success at the Atlanta association?

I am most proud of a victory from 2009, when we stopped the city from adopting a green building ordinance that would have mandated that all construction meet LEED (the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) or LEED-equivalent standards. The ordinance would have devastated the commercial market and driven jobs out of town. Every environmental group in town lined up against us, and the mayor’s chief financial officer refused to negotiate any financial incentives for developers, owners, or tenants.

Undeterred, REALTORS® responded by staking out an environmentally friendly position in favor of a voluntary, incentive-based ordinance. We assembled a broad coalition of like-minded allies, designed a game plan that shifted the debate away from environmental passions and toward economic realities, and utilized the power of our grassroots activists. ■