

## AOTPAC: The Political Voice of Occupational Therapy

**Gail Fisher** 

**Christina Metzler** 

he American Occupational Therapy Political Action Committee (AOTPAC) recently celebrated its 35th year of advocacy at AOTA's 93rd Annual Conference & Expo, in San Diego. There, we recalled the many achievements made possible by hard-working volunteers and supportive members who give so much to ensure that occupational therapy has a loud and clear voice in Washington, DC. Your continued support will help keep AOTPAC healthy, vibrant, and strong for the next 35 years.

Frequently, contributors ask AOTPAC how it decides which political candidates to support with the voluntary financial contributions from AOTA members. Our focus is always to fund those candidates who support occupational therapy through their votes, words, and deeds. In deciding which candidates to support through donations, the AOTPAC Board, which is composed of six AOTA members, puts the needs of occupational therapy first and foremost.

The politics and opinions of individual AOTA members are uniquely their own, as they should be. They might consider a candidate's place on the political spectrum, his or her opinions on foreign affairs or the environment, and many other factors when deciding how to cast their individual ballots. But when the AOTPAC Board affirms support for a candidate, all of the factors under consideration must always relate to the needs and goals of occupational therapy. For AOTPAC, the key points are how a candidate has acted to support occupational therapy and whether his or her office is approachable and willing to be educated about issues important to AOTA and the profession. AOTPAC



also considers whether a candidate is a chair of a critical committee or a party leader, as these individuals are powerful and their decisions can affect occupational therapy more significantly than others. A candidate's place on the political spectrum has no direct bearing on whether he or she receives AOTPAC funding. The political sands are unstable, and today's minority party may be in the majority following the next election. With that in mind, AOTPAC is even handed, working with Republicans, Democrats, and Independents when they demonstrate a willingness to work with us, or when they are of critical importance to achieving our agenda. Keeping these legislators in office helps ensure our priorities are part of the legislative process.

All PACs are governed by federal law and administered by the Federal Election Commission. Every contribution is reported, and the information is available to the public. According to federal law, candidates can receive a maximum of \$5,000 from a PAC per election. This translates into a maximum of \$10,000 total per typical election cycle because of the primary and general elections. This cycle occurs every 2 years for members of the House of Representatives and every 6 years for U.S. senators. Although AOTPAC has the ability to provide

these maximums to a few key candidates, most often its contributions are smaller and made to maximize the impact of its resources.

Although the AOTPAC Board gets input from AOTA staff, decisions are made by the Board itself. AOTPAC's guidelines for giving help ensure that AOTPAC remains focused on funding candidates who are friendly or important to occupational therapy interests. The Board also considers requests from AOTA members. Often, new and promising candidates come to the Board's attention because of member recommendations. The Board supports those candidates whom it wants to see elected or re-elected for the good of our profession.

Deciding whom to support with AOTPAC dollars is always a challenging proposition, but the process itself is affirmed when AOTPAC helps elect and re-elect strong advocates for the profession, ranging politically from Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD) to Senator Michael Enzi (R-WY).

AOTPAC works for you in many of the same ways AOTA works for you: constantly watching for opportunities for the profession to move forward. AOTPAC work and and the voluntary contributions of AOTA members that make it all possible strongly support AOTA's federal affairs agenda, which helps protect your jobs, sources of reimbursement, and scope of practice. AOTPAC and AOTA work for you, so get involved and contribute. Let's reach the centennial of the profession with an even stronger and more powerful voice on Capitol Hill.

Gail Fisher, MPA, OTR/L, FAOTA, is AOTPAC's

**Christina Metzler** is AOTA's chief public affairs officer.