AOTPAC FACT SHEET

What is a PAC?

A political action committee (PAC) is the legally sanctioned vehicle through which organizations, such as The American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc. (AOTA), can engage in otherwise prohibited political action and work to influence the outcome of Federal elections.

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) Act of 1971, recognized that corporations and professional and trade associations have a vital and legitimate interest in the operation of government. A PAC is the only legal and ethical way a profession can unite behind the candidates of its choice.

What is AOTPAC?

The American Occupational Therapy Political Action Committee (AOTPAC) is a voluntary, non-profit, unincorporated committee of members of AOTA. AOTPAC was authorized by the Representative Assembly in 1976 and has been operational since the Spring of 1978. The purpose of AOTPAC is to further the legislative aims of the Association by influencing or attempting to influence the selection, nomination, election, or appointment of any individual to any Federal public office, and of any occupational therapist, occupational therapy assistant, or occupational therapy student member of AOTA seeking election to public office at any level. The committee is not affiliated with any political party.

Why does AOTA need a PAC?

AOTA standing alone cannot contribute even a token amount to a candidate. Through a PAC, AOTA can solicit and direct the flow of contributions from its members and provide important assistance to individual candidates for election to Federal office.

Decisions of Congress can and do have a direct, long-range effect on the occupational therapy profession. When individuals with mutual interests unite and support candidates who share those interests, steps toward favorable action can be encouraged. The candidates who support the profession need our professional support.

Since its establishment, AOTPAC has made political contributions to candidates for election to both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate in almost every state. This political involvement has enabled the Association to broaden its contacts in the legislative and executive branches. Through AOTPAC, occupational therapy practitioners have a collective voice that will be heard in the debates over the ever-expanding number of health care issues that come before the Congress.

Who controls AOTPAC'S money?

A five member Board of Directors makes decisions regarding which candidates will receive AOTPAC support. The AOTA Board of Directors appoints the AOTPAC Board members for a three-year term and each one represents a specific region of the United States.

By law AOTA is allowed to fund AOTPAC's operating expenses. Through a budgeted allowance, the Association assumes the expenses of office space, supplies, postage, printing, publications, and fundraising. Existing national office staff and office space are used to support AOTPAC activities. The money that the Association provides for expenses is known as "soft" dollars. This money will be made available by the Association as long as the profession is committed to the concept of political action, but it cannot be used to support candidates.

The funds that are raised by AOTPAC are used to their fullest potential as campaign contributions. This money, known as "hard" dollars, must be placed in a separate segregated fund. These “hard” dollars are provided by individual contributions.

Is AOTPAC ethical?
Yes. A campaign contribution through AOTPAC is not a means of buying votes. It is a "no strings attached" way of ensuring that responsible and dedicated legislators who understand and support the occupational therapy profession remain in or are elected to office.

To ensure the money is well protected and properly spent, many detailed reports are required by the Federal Election Commission from both AOTPAC and the candidates it supports. Both must account for the sources of their funds and the purposes for which these funds are spent.

Many professions, including physicians, dentists, nurses, medical laboratory technologists, optometrists, and physical therapists have made the concept of a PAC part of their government affairs efforts, all working within the system to better their advantage.

What criteria determine which candidates are supported?
Among the factors relied upon by the AOTPAC Board on reaching decisions regarding which candidates will receive AOTPAC support are the recommendations of Association members and officers, the leadership of state associations, and the advice of the Federal Affairs staff of AOTA. Federal Affairs staff analyzes and interprets Congressional voting records and are able to pinpoint who is who in the area of health legislation and who supports the profession of occupational therapy.

Among the criteria used by the AOTPAC Board to determine which candidates to support are the following factors:

1. Is the candidate sympathetic to the goals of the occupational therapy profession? Has the candidate supported specific proposals or policies advanced by the profession?

2. If an incumbent, does the candidate hold a key position of responsibility (i.e. chair or member of important committee or subcommittee; member of majority or minority leadership)?

3. If a nonincumbent, will the candidate pursue assignment to a key committee or subcommittee, or likely to be in a position to assist the profession?

AOTPAC makes financial contributions to candidates for Federal office regardless of party affiliation.

What is AOTPAC's record?
For the year 2006 federal elections, contributions were used to support 109 candidates across the country with a success rate of 94%.

How does AOTPAC raise money?
The majority of money raised by AOTPAC is through direct AOTA member contributions. On the application for AOTA membership a space is provided to include a contribution to the PAC. Telemarketing efforts and/or mail solicitations are conducted at least once per year. A booth is hosted by AOTPAC and fund raising activities are held during the AOTA Annual Conference. Other means are used when available.

By becoming politically aware and involved, occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, and students of occupational therapy can ensure at least some measure of input into the decisions that affect their professional lives so directly. Because of member participation, AOTPAC continues to make a difference, but it can only be as successful as we choose to make it. Remember the candidates who support our profession need our professional support.

Additional Resources
AOTA Web site – **www.aota.org/aotpac**
Federal Affairs staff of AOTA
AOTPAC video presentation, available from Federal Affairs staff