

FRANCHISING AND POLITICS – USA STYLE

by Stewart Germann

I am a member of the Supplier Forum Board of the IFA and I have been on that Board for nearly six years. I travel from Auckland, New Zealand for my Board meetings and in September 2006 I attended Washington, DC and experienced my first Franchise Appreciation Day (FAD).

I well remember when the IFA promoted its first FAD back in 1999 and it has certainly grown since then. The third FAD should have taken place in 2001 but 9/11 occurred less than two weeks before the designated day and the IFA wisely cancelled it. I can remember getting an e-mail from Don DeBolt, the President of IFA at that time, in relation to the cancellation because of 9/11 and a subsequent note in relation to what many franchisor members of the IFA were doing to support 9/11. I read that e-mail with tears in my eyes and have never forgotten it.

I well remember reading that Dina Dwyer-Owen of The Dwyer Group could not get home to Waco, Texas, because all of the flights had been grounded. So what did she do? She drove thousands of miles back home and visited franchisees of The Dwyer Group on the way. I am sure that many other members of the IFA did amazing things in 2001.

The seventh annual FAD on September 26, 2006 was a great success with over 400 attending, a big jump from last year I was told. The build up to FAD was tremendous with a number of speakers addressing us including a fantastic address from Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez of the Department of Commerce and a member of President Bush's cabinet. I remember from his introduction that he was born in Cuba and moved to the USA when he was about 12 and he spoke very confidently about the future and mentioned the franchise sector a number of times.

I was told that there has been economic growth in the US for the last 13 quarters, that unemployment is low at about 4%, that 1 in 7 jobs in the private sector are created from franchising and that immigration is a big issue. The briefing on September 26 by David French of the IFA certainly left me in no doubt that there must be immigration reform, that there must be legislation which would make affordable health insurance for small business employees, and that employees should have the right to secret ballot elections. I was astounded to hear that over 12 million people had entered the United States illegally, mainly from Mexico, and that 3,000 babies had been born out of those illegal immigrants. No doubt the real numbers are much higher but the US does have a major problem in relation to illegal immigrants.

My FAD experience at Capitol Hill blew me away. With my colleagues, I attended appointments with Senator Dianne Feinstein and Senator Barbara Boxer of California but unfortunately both of those ladies were in Congress which was sitting and we only were able to meet with their under secretaries. Being from New Zealand and being an outsider I was very quiet and at each of those meetings there were probably about 15 attendees.

My friend Peter Holt took me under his wing, made me feel very welcome and guided me into and out of the meetings and he gave me a full briefing on the particular politicians which was most helpful. I also attended some meetings with my colleagues Bill Edwards and David Holmes and I have two favourite meetings.

John Campbell

Bill Edwards, another lady and I attended the meeting with John Campbell so there were only four people in the room. What a delightful member of congress. He was newly appointed as the representative for the Newport Beach area and he was so personable and friendly, and interested. We discuss the immigration problem and the small business health plans and we gave him the franchising statistics. Everyone proudly wore their 1 in 7 badge (I thought that was a tremendous idea except it tripped the metal detectors when we entered the various buildings in the presence of the security officers) and John was amazed at the growth and power of franchising. I note from the excellent Congress Directory that John is 51, born in Los Angeles, a business owner, married to Catherine and with his District Office at Newport Beach. He is in his first term and I understand that "45%" means that he only obtained 45% of the vote but he was still elected. I think he will turn out to be an excellent politician representing the Republicans, but only time will tell.

Susan Davis

Now what a lady! Peter Holt, another gentleman and I had to wait for her but her staff were most friendly. There was a map of the San Diego area on the wall in her reception and Peter was able to locate the street where his house is situated. There were lots of interesting things on the walls and we chatted with her friendly secretary until Susan arrived. She apologised for being late but immediately ushered us in to her office. I noted on the wall that there was a picture of a naval academy and a certificate naming her and I immediately concluded that she was high up in the navy. There was also a picture of an aircraft carrier so I was certainly in the presence of a most powerful lady.

Susan was extremely interested in franchising and Peter reeled off the statistics from memory and with persuasive knowledge. When she heard that I was from New Zealand she immediately chatted to me and liked my accent. We then talked about the immigration issue, the health issue and the practice of secret ballot elections during union organising campaigns. She was extremely intelligent and I note from her bio that she is 62, from Cambridge, Massachusetts, Jewish, previously a social worker and married to Steve. Her portfolio is concerned with armed services, education in the work force and her district office is at San Diego. I see that she represents the Democrats, is in her third term with 67% of the vote. You will appreciate that for a foreigner (some people call me an alien) American politics is all new to me although I certainly try to follow the presidential elections which I understand will be in 2008.

After all the meetings (I attended five in total with a lot of walking between buildings on a hot day), including visiting the Supreme Court between appointments and also the Veterans

History Project at the American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress, we all went to the Congressional Reception in the Cannon Caucus Room, and what a function. I met many people both new and old and I really enjoyed chatting with David French, Victoria Adams and Troy Flannigan from the IFA who are certainly extremely knowledgeable about the political scene.

My Impressions

My impressions of my first FAD are warm and exciting. I found the whole experience a most meaningful event, highly organised by the IFA but with real friendliness and interest from the politicians. I knew that franchising was important worldwide and it is certainly going from strength to strength in New Zealand. However, franchising is big business in the US and to be able to promote that franchising creates 1 in 7 jobs in the private sector shows the impact which franchising has upon the US economy. I felt privileged to be the only foreigner (as far as I am aware) who participated in Franchise Appreciation Day 2006 and I have told many people, both within New Zealand and outside, of my wonderful experience.

Roll on Franchise Appreciation Day 2007.

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