

The Steward as Political Activist

Nowadays, our communities are bigger than they used to be, major changes happen almost overnight, and no person or organization can exist as an island. Like it or not, society is more and more interdependent all the time, and so are we.

A lot of what all workers have today: overtime pay, food and drug laws, Medicare, Social Security, health and safety regulations, even the public education system--we wouldn't have without political action by organized labor.

As a steward, sooner or later you'll be working with coalition partners. Which, depending where you are, can be almost anybody--other unions, civil rights and civil liberties organizations, community activists, ethnic groups, social or charitable organizations, political coalitions, whatever.

There are many rights and benefits that are determined by laws passed at the national, state, or local level. To protect our members' interests, the union must be involved in electing candidates who will pass and enforce laws which will increase and protect our rights and benefits.

That will not happen without you.

Many SEIU members are public employees or work in positions funded through government agencies, so politics is especially important to us. When politicians cut services, everyone loses the services, but some of us lose our jobs.

Our success in building a strong political organization that stands up for our members' interests depends on you and your ability to mobilize our members. SEIU depends on you, the steward, to get the workers involved in political and legislative action. You know the members, you see them every day at work, and you're persuasive enough to get things rolling (or you wouldn't be a steward).

Think of what you can do at your workplace or in your community that will make a difference.

Register voters. It's simple. If you aren't registered, you can't vote. Learn the procedure for voter registration in your district. Then act to make sure your members register. Better yet, recruit members to participate in a voter registration drive.

GOTV (Get Out The Vote). Make phone calls or recruit other members to participate in phone banks and other activities before an election.

Educate the members. Talk to your members (and listen) about candidates and issues. Keep them informed about the election. Become informed about SEIU's political and legislative program.