

Myers: OSEA Should Financially Support Candidates and Issues

Secretary of State Clay Myers urged OSEA's 1971 General Council to adopt a political action resolution in a speech to delegates during the opening day of the three-day convention.

The resolution authorizes creation of an "independent, non-partisan political action organization through which those who choose to so participate may participate legally and democratically in the raising and expending of funds for the election campaigns of persons favorable to the interests of state and other public employees and the causes of good government." It was later adopted by the delegates.

Adoption of the resolution "would cause ripples of nervousness, particularly among members of the legislature," Myers said.

"But, speaking purely as an OSEA member, and if the opportunity were available, I would vote 'yes' for the resolution," he told delegates. "Let me tell you why."

"Seventeen-thousand employees is a sizable aggregation, one to be reckoned with under any circumstances. But, ironically, OSEA has been a handcuffed giant, like Gulliver in Lilliput, before the legislature at budget time every two years."

"True," Myers said, "state employees are represented—and ably—by OSEA staff during the

legislative sessions. But, moral persuasion and comparative statistics are virtually the only tools available to them."

"Frankly that all too often is not enough," Myers noted.

"It isn't the fault of the individual legislators. They are surrounded and besieged by pressures and pressure groups, and heaven only knows how most of them manage to make an independent decision on anything in such atmosphere," he commented.

"Few of us would argue, perhaps, that lobbying by special interest groups is the best way to make law in a democratic society. But, at the same time, we must be realistic enough to recognize lobbying as a fact of life, as the system now operates."

"That being true," Myers said, "the more 'muscle' OSEA can develop, and flex, from time to time, in the interest of state employees, the more effective it will be in the 'gentlemanly' free-for-all that permeates the legislative process."

Myers said it is "perfectly proper" for OSEA to offer financial support to certain candidates and issues.

"The candidates will be deeply grateful for your assistance—though their opponents will probably be somewhat less pleased about the situation—and they could conceivably even make overtures to you for that support," the secretary of state said.

"But—and this is what I want to underscore—once that man is elected, do not expect any special treatment from him. You will not have purchased his vote or even his influence."

"That must be your attitude if you decide to become politically active," Myers warned.

"You should look upon it as an investment in good government, as an effort to encourage candidates of the highest quality to seek public office. To participate in politics is to participate in the very mechanics of our two-party method of obtaining the best qualified persons for our elective offices," he said.

"I congratulate the OSEA for its interest in a more active role in the political arena. It is a credit to your determination to provide a stronger voice for all state employees," he said.

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