

INTERFACE

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Are You an Advocate?

This year has been one for the record books. In February, just as many of us were preparing to attend the Community College National Legislative Summit, Washington, D.C., was hit with three feet of snow, bringing travel to a rapid halt as many of us were preparing to visit with elected representatives on behalf of our institutions. This brings me to my topic for this column — what is legislative advocacy, and are you an advocate?

According to dictionary.com, advocacy is the act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy. Legislative advocacy is the process of tracking the legislative session and the events that take place during the session. Our boards of trustees and governing boards communicate their desire for certain actions on bills and request federal funding. Our boards are advocates for our institutions.

In the same way our boards are advocates on the federal and state levels, we are equally important on the community level. While PBSN members track issues at the federal, state, and community levels, we also represent our institutions daily, whether it be in our office meeting visitors, at lunch in a restaurant, or simply shopping for groceries. We are facilitators of information from the community to the president and board of trustees. As we take part in many community committees and events, we are able to build good working relationships and support for our institutions. This is an asset when it comes to soliciting financial support from the community. PBSN members relay information about our institutions between the faculty and staff, and the president and board of trustees. We are able to express views, concerns, and opinions while staying neutral and avoiding conflicts of interest. As a professional board staff network member, you are a vital link in the advocacy process.

As I close, I want to encourage everyone to attend this October's ACCT Annual Leadership Congress in Toronto, Canada. One necessary item for your trip: You must have a passport. Take time now to check your board members' passport statuses. If you already have a passport, check the expiration date. If you need to obtain one, you still have time to start the process, but remember that time is running out. Registration is now open, so make your reservations. I look forward to seeing you in Toronto. This is a great opportunity for professional development, increasing your knowledge base, and networking with your peers. Look around at the Congress — your fellow PBSN members will be wearing blue ribbons on their name tags and are eager to meet new friends and share ideas.

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INTERFACE

Patience, Persistence, and Perseverance in the Face of the Storm

By Terri Grimes, Highland Community College, Ill.



“I realized the storm’s impact not only in Washington, but also on the hundreds of presidents, trustees, and board staff who were scheduled to meet at the conference. I also learned a valuable lesson about patience, persistence, and perseverance.”



Photos by Austin Walker, Highland (Ill.) Community College Student Trustee

INTERFACE

LIVING IN THE MIDWEST ALL MY LIFE, I HAVE EXPERIENCED MY share of snowstorms and blizzards, but nothing prepared me for what I was about to experience traveling to the National Legislative Summit in Washington, D.C., in February. It all started with a phone call two days before we were originally scheduled to leave. The wife of one of my trustees called from D.C., where they were visiting family, to let me know that I should pack my boots because Washington was preparing for at least two feet of snow, and possibly more. Flights were already being canceled, and it was likely that our own Saturday flight could also be canceled. I hung up the phone wondering if I should reschedule or take the chance that our flight would depart as planned. If only I had a crystal ball!

I was not the only one affected by the impending storm. Soon after I hung up the phone, I started receiving e-mails and text messages from other Professional Board Staff Network executive committee members, several of whom had already had their flights canceled. Knowing the importance of having an opportunity to meet with our legislators, we were all frantically trying to reschedule our travel arrangements, as well as those of our presidents, trustees, and student trustees, in order to arrive in Washington in time for the conference. In addition to the important meetings with legislators, many of the executive committee members had arranged to meet during the NLS to begin planning our PBSN sessions for the Annual Leadership Congress in October. Mother Nature, however, had other plans. I thought back to last year's NLS when we were going to Capitol Hill and temperatures were in the 60s. Weather sure is unpredictable!

Deciding that our best option was to move our flight up a day, I rescheduled our flight for 8 a.m. Having just experienced a snowstorm that dumped 15 inches of snow in my area of northern Illinois in December, I really thought I was prepared. Even as I was packing my boots the night before, I thought, "How much worse can 24 inches of snow really be?" I was reminded of something my president had said to me the first time I attended the NLS and we were trudging along through snow and ice. I could hear him say, "Don't forget to pack your sensible shoes." Yes, sensible shoes and boots would be a must for this trip!

Early the next morning, we left northern Illinois for Chicago. Mindful of the weather that was scheduled to hit D.C. later that day, we were hoping our rescheduled flight would still depart as scheduled. We patiently waited while we experienced a 20-minute delay on the runway in Chicago

and another 20-minute delay over Washington while the airport maintenance authorities prepared the runways for the impending storm. We arrived almost on time, the last plane from Chicago to land at Reagan International Airport. At least we were ahead of the storm!

Saturday brought another flurry of e-mails and text messages as executive committee members kept in constant contact with each other while they persevered to reschedule travel arrangements. In some instances, even the rescheduled flights were canceled and had to be rescheduled again. If nothing else, through this experience I learned that PBSN members are persistent. Although 24 inches of snow was on the ground, it had finally stopped snowing and everyone was hopeful the airports would soon reopen.

Sunday morning, the sun was shining. Stopping at the ACCT registration desk to pick up our information packets, we learned that only 64 people had checked in for the conference at that point. It was at that point I realized the storm's impact not only in Washington, but also on the hundreds of presidents, trustees, and board staff who were scheduled to meet at the conference.

Although we ultimately received word that the conference had been canceled and rescheduled for March, I learned a valuable lesson about patience, persistence, and perseverance. It sometimes takes all three to weather the storms of life. Just like those of us who traveled to D.C. — and those who tried to get there only to have their flights canceled — learned patience, persistence, and perseverance in the face of adverse weather conditions, these three words are also keys to weathering the storms of the current economy and high unemployment rates.

The theme of the fall Annual Leadership Congress, "Community Colleges are Indispensable to Reinvigorating the Economy," serves as a reminder that, despite these tough economic times, community colleges play a key role in economic recovery. Most community colleges nationwide are facing funding decreases that have resulted in difficult budget decisions, including program cuts, staff reductions, and decreases in travel and other expenses. It is essential during this economic climate, however, that we continue to promote our institutions and keep our legislators and constituents apprised of the important role community colleges play in turning the economy around.

Community colleges are a critical component of economic recovery. We provide hope that there are brighter days ahead. It just takes patience, persistence, and perseverance!