



Advocating for the Community of Private Clubs

By JOE TRAUGER, *Vice President of Government Relations, National Club Association*

As the National Club Association's (NCA) new vice president of government relations, it's a pleasure to appear in The FORUM for the first time.

While new to NCA, my involvement with the private club community stretches back for quite some time and I am currently in my fifth year on the board of directors of Mount Vernon Country Club (MVCC) in Alexandria, Virginia. MVCC has meant so much to me and my family over the years that I felt compelled to serve its membership on the board and I was humbled to have been elected president for 2019. I began my career in Washington working on Capitol Hill for nearly 10 years, four of which were in House Leadership. After leaving the Hill I became an advocate for a number of industries, primarily in the manufacturing and health care space. In April, I joined the NCA staff and am fortunate to be able to combine what I do professionally with the private club community I love.

From its founding, private clubs have been woven into the fabric of our country. While not explicitly written within the First Amendment, the United States Supreme Court decided in *Roberts v. United States Jaycees* that the Amendment implicitly ensures a "corresponding right to associate with others in pursuit of a wide variety of political, social, economic, educational, religious and cultural ends." More commonly known and understood, the First Amendment protects "the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." It's the guarantee that clubs, associations, unions and other organizations, as well as individuals, have the right to advocate and lobby for or against things we believe are important. The National Club Association is the advocate for private clubs in Washington and the more members and voices we have, the stronger we are in advocating for the social, economic, educational and cultural ends that bond us all as a community of private clubs.



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As leaders in your field, you know there are many issues that affect private clubs and it's important for policymakers in Washington and the states to know and understand the effect current or proposed laws and regulations have on our community.



While the term lobbying has taken on a negative connotation over the years—some of it deserved, much of it not—it is primarily an effort to inform legislators, regulators and administrators about the impact the actions they've taken or propose to take have on our community. NCA is engaged on issues across the spectrum such as health care, labor, workforce, taxes, environment and immigration. As a board member and president of Mount Vernon Country Club, I see firsthand how all these issues affect the health and vitality of clubs.

Some recent developments in Washington have been positive, such as the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Labor's decision to release an additional 30,000 H-2B visas that will allow businesses to hire much-needed seasonal labor. Additionally, the Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Defense proposed a revised "Waters of the United States (WO-TUS)" rule to replace the one issued during the Obama Administration. NCA recently joined with other golf organizations to file comments with the EPA and DOD. The comments were generally supportive of the new rule and highlighted some areas important to clubs, such as ensuring that artificial, ornamental, irrigation and stormwater lakes and ponds were not covered.

On the tax front, NCA has been working with organizations in Maryland and New York to fend off legislation that would change the property tax treatment of golf courses and increase annual assessments by anywhere from four to 10 times their current amounts. Clearly, such dramatic increases would threaten the existence of a significant number of clubs and force others to scramble to make up the difference.

NCA wants to be engaged in the issues that matter to you. I invite you to contact me at trauger@nationalclub.org or (202) 822-9822 to share your concerns—on the national, state and local levels. Together, the private club community can make a difference. ■

