



## 2008—A Big Election Year Nationally and in Michigan

With Monday falling on the first day of September, this is the earliest possible date for Labor Day to occur and—wouldn't you know it—this is an election year. This is significant, because Labor Day is when Presidential election campaigning traditionally kicks into overdrive. Since our membership area falls within states that are considered key states in this year's election, we can expect to be inundated with political ads and phone calls. The very thought makes me pause.

Labor Day weekend was bright and sunny, but later that week, some much needed rain came in with clouds not far behind, leaving us with weather that is more conducive to thinking about election 2008. Not that politics is all clouds and no sunshine, but at this point, the election outlook is not clear, if only because we don't know who our elected leaders will be when they take office in January 2009.

What we do know—at least in Michigan—is that 46 of the 110 members of the Michigan House of Representatives will not be returning. Two members of the House are running for other offices, and 44 have been term limited. That means we are replacing 41.8 percent of the House in this election. They will be replaced by first term, untested Representatives. The newly elected will be qualified to hold office but probably will know little about agriculture and even less about dairying.

At the national level, the Presidential election is turning out to be very interesting. Otherwise, the national election can be more

easily forecast. It is predicted to be less sensational than election 2006. In 2006, a total shift in leadership positions occurred when the Democrats took over control in both the House and the Senate. This year, predictions are for an even stronger showing by the Democrats in both the House and the Senate, and that shouldn't lead to big changes in leadership positions. We have established a good working relationship with the current leaders, which has a direct effect on our industry. We must continue to keep up the dialogue.

In Michigan, establishing such relationships is more challenging. Michigan, with its term limits, serves as an extreme example of why we must be politically active at all levels and in all stages of the political process. Put yourself in an elected official's position. Wouldn't you be wary of all the people "buddying up" to you when you know full well that they probably want something from you? That's a good reason to build a relationship long before you do indeed want something from them, like a favorable vote.

First, we need to be well-informed voters. The intent of term limits, I think, is to ensure that we have a citizen-led political system rather than one run by entrenched professionals; however, that requires that we elect very capable individuals. They have to be able to grasp the responsibilities they are entrusted with so quickly. Second, no matter how sharp they are, those who are elected need all of us to

help them in the learning process. Think of yourself in a similar position, moving from running a dairy farm with all of its complexities that you know and understand to a position where you must learn the needs of all businesses in your state, plus state budgets, regulatory rules, public health issues and more. I don't think it would be an easy job. If I were in that position, I think I would welcome all the help I could get. Third, wrapped into one and two, is that we all need to be involved, which is really what a democracy is all about.

We don't know who will be elected this November, but we do know that we will be working with them, at least until the next election cycle and maybe for years to come. Therefore, it just makes sense to dig in and do our best to build that relationship so that we can make our representatives better aware of the critically important role our industry plays in providing a safe, wholesome and affordable supply of food—not only to our country but to many people around the world.

MMPA members have stepped up to the plate and have become more active in the democratic process, personally and through their increased contributions to our co-op's political action fund the MMPAC. The increased political activity has borne results on both the local and national level. Let's keep up the progress both personally and through contributions to the MMPAC.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.