Discussion Topic
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WHAT DO YOU WANT IN A POLITICIAN?

An election is like a job interview. Voters decide who they want to hire for the next few years, and if performance doesn't match expectations, the politician gets the pink slip.

Officials serve at the fickle whim of voters, and as the next election nears, they should keep a few things in mind, said Sarah Black, director of the Public Policy and Commodity Division with Michigan Farm Bureau. "Farmers have people come to their farms all the time hoping to do business with them," she said. "The farmer talks to them, evaluates their qualifications, the strength of their proposals and decides if the person is honest enough to do business with. It's the same with politicians."

Farm Bureau members also consider whether a politician will be faithful to policies that help farm businesses thrive and grow; and whether there is any common sense at play. To measure such things, farmers may need to communicate with a candidate after the election. "What it all boils down to is making sure you keep in touch. That doesn't mean you should be a bother to your Representative or Senator, but an e-mail now and then, both when you agree with them and when you disagree, can go a long way," Black said.

Michigan Farm Bureau keeps tabs of votes, of course, and asks for its members' help whenever something's about to happen in Lansing or D.C. that affects agriculture's interests, and there's power in those member calls, letters and emails.

"Most of the time, our members respond en force when our lobbying team sees something important to ag about to surface," Black said. "Sometimes they're much too busy farming to drop everything at a moment's notice. But one way or another, Farm Bureau members make their voices heard, and that's how things get done in Lansing.

Remember that lawmakers are intelligent, thoughtful people for the most part," Black said. "If they've been in the public light for any time at all, they know how to compromise and listen to their constituents. Unfortunately, sometimes the loudest voices - the squeakiest wheels - get the most attention." That's where reason, calm and logic - the same method farmers must use every day for their business decisions - can be invaluable.

"In the political world, extremes tend to cry out the loudest," Black said. "But most of the time, common sense will win out." When it doesn't, well, that's when agriculture's voters take the next step. "Farmers want honest people in office who communicate with them and stay true to their word. That's a good way to keep a job, no matter what profession is involved."

QUESTIONS

1. **Has your county Farm Bureau begun searching for candidates for local, county or state offices? Why or why not?**
2. **What can your county Farm Bureau do to be sure members hold politicians accountable for their actions?**
3. **What qualities are you looking for in the next candidate who wants to represent you in Lansing? List the top three.**