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NATO PACS UP

Our new power tool

There's a joke about two members of Congress out hiking in the woods. One of them spots a very large grizzly in the distance about to charge at them. He starts running while his companion sits down, removes his hiking shoes, reaches into his backpack and pulls out a pair of running shoes and starts to put them on. The first one says, "Hey, are you nuts? You can't outrun a hungry grizzly." The other guy says, "I don't have to outrun the grizzly—I just have to outrun you!"

Having worked as a Counsel on a Senate committee, I can attest that members of Congress are constantly running, either figuratively or literally. How many times have we seen the press focus on the "race" for re-election, or more to the point of this article, the "race" to raise money to communicate their message? And for the most part, the money that funds election campaigns comes from Political Action Committees, more commonly referred to as PACs, which have become one of the three essential tools for any association's successful political advocacy efforts, along with direct lobbying of lawmakers and a well-organized, effective grassroots network. A PAC enables an organization to support financially those lawmakers and candidates who are supportive of its areas of concern.

Since NATO moved to Washington, D.C. in 2005, the association's Government Affairs division has experienced a number of successes employing well-reasoned arguments when lobbying lawmakers and policy makers through the ongoing development of an increasingly effective grassroots network and by partnering with other associations and industries through coalitions. Without a PAC, however, exhibition is missing an important lobbying tool.

Funding of campaigns indirectly dominates many policy issues, including those important to the exhibition industry. Although PAC contributions cannot be contingent on specific impact decision making by federal policy makers (any such "quid pro quo" would be illegal), they often influence who can get access to a legislator to make their case in the first place. NATO's lobbying efforts in Washington, D.C. are disadvantaged when we cannot afford to attend fundraisers or write checks to candidates who are sensitive to issues important to exhibition. Those activities help to develop the kind of relationship where a subsequent meeting request might be honored. Stated another way, a PAC is essential to NATO's political advocacy by giving the exhibition industry a "seat at the table."

While some NATO members might have philosophical objections to political contributions, the reality is that

political decisions impact movie theater operations. An organization's participation in the political process requires a certain level of involvement; a NATO PAC would give the exhibition industry credibility in that regard. Furthermore, contributions from a NATO PAC would provide tangible recognition to candidates or incumbents who support the exhibition industry's positions.

Simply put, NATO has an obligation to its members to help support and elect candidates who advocate on issues important to exhibition. That means giving money to campaigns, and the only legal way for associations like NATO to donate money to individual political candidates is through PACs, and the only way PACs are funded is by individual contributions.

NATO's leadership is moving forward with the establishment of a PAC for the following reasons:

In Washington, D.C., an organization is not considered a viable player unless it has a PAC.

A PAC is an important tool to help place in office candidates who are sensitive to the concerns of exhibition.

Many entertainment and media industries have functioning PACs which provide the access to policy makers to help shape policy; labor union PACs have millions of dollars for this purpose.

Without a PAC, NATO misses many opportunities to present our case to lawmakers and candidates.

NATO members will oversee PAC operations, and will operate under guidelines that assure contributions will be given to any member of Congress, regardless of party, who supports our interests.

NATO has successfully advocated the interests of the exhibition industry for years, and will continue to confront myriad legislative and regulatory challenges in the current politicized environment. To respond to these challenges effectively, NATO will need access to every legitimate tool to best represent the interests of our members on Capitol Hill. A PAC is one of the most important of those tools, and the Executive Board has signaled that it will authorize its creation. We look forward to your support.