

CONGRESSIONAL CAUCUSES

There's a Group for That?

By Rebecca Patrick

The very first recorded meeting of supporters or members of a movement or political party – commonly referred to as a caucus – started here before the U.S. was even a country. Under British colony rule in 1763, future Founding Father John Adams wrote in his diary about such a gathering in Massachusetts.

In modern day politics, this routinely happens in Congress and state legislatures. Some caucuses, like the Congressional Black Caucus or Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues, are well known and speak for themselves. Others focus on specific topics to study – childhood cancer or diabetes as examples. Yet more caucuses than you would imagine at the federal level are surprising by their very existence.

Getting in the spirit(s)

From bourbon to wine to small breweries and more, the caucus bar appears fully stocked! Congressman Pete Visclosky (1st District) sits on the Wine Caucus, which has its own web site that describes the members as having “deep appreciation of wine” in addition to promoting the wine industry and recognizing the impact it has in this country; more than one million jobs are tied to the wine-making business.

Never fear, teetotalers, there is also a place for you: the Carbonated and Non-Alcoholic Caucus – also known as, I kid you not, the CAN Caucus.

Around the globe

The Friends of Switzerland moniker is a curious one since the country is known for its neutrality, but perhaps that makes everyone a friend. In all seriousness, the group's purpose is to further American-Swiss relations, with more than 40 congressional members meeting annually with their legislative counterparts in the Swiss Federal Assembly. Three are Indiana representatives – André Carson (7th District), Marlin Stutzman (3rd District) and Visclosky.

Quite a few other locales also receive the caucus treatment to help further ties: Azerbaijan, Croatia, Norway, Panama, Scotland, Spain and Thailand among them.

Fun and games

Wonder if Sen. Joe Donnelly (D-South

Bend), who is a co-chair of the Congressional Boating Caucus, starts meetings with, “All aboard!” Probably not. One also shouldn't look for members routinely leaving a dock. This group was formed over 25 years ago to focus advocacy efforts on the recreational boating industry, which according to the National Marine Manufacturers Association, accounts for \$72 billion to the U.S. economy and employs nearly 350,000 workers.

Sometimes, however, a caucus is what it appears to be: a good time. That's exactly what Texas Congressman Roger Williams envisioned when he formed the Congressional Baseball Caucus in 2013.

“I can't think of a better way to set aside our partisan differences than to get together once in a while and hear from baseball legends, discuss important issues about the game and simply enjoy each other's



A shared passion for baseball helps bring members of Congress together for an annual charity game and additional activities throughout the year.

company,” he said in a statement from the caucus announcement.

Similarly, the Congressional Hockey Caucus strives to “ensure that the sport of hockey can be enjoyed by everyone.” The group has also been known to put on a hockey challenge for charity. Larry Bucshon, who represents Indiana’s 8th district, was the first GOP member to actually participate in a game.

Cement and more

More than a few of the congressional caucuses probably are lacking in any nice perks or events like the aforementioned ones. They also may not be glamorous on the surface – think Congressional Aluminum Caucus and Congressional Cement Caucus – but business and industry needs them all the same. Newburgh’s Bucshon sits on both of these groups.

If one is passionate about horticulture and farming, look no further than the Cut Flower Caucus.

Meanwhile, the Congressional Toy Caucus may or may not grant your entrance to the North Pole.

We will be up to U.S. President number 45 come January, but so far that hasn’t



There’s nothing like the Cut Flower Caucus to deliver some color to a Washington meeting.

translated to an onslaught of caucuses in honor of the individual or his ideology. Just one president – Ronald Reagan – has his own caucus.

There are hundreds of congressional caucuses in total. Many advocate for an industry – large or small – and are often

started by or encouraged by a trade association. Other lofty efforts serve to further discussions on a subject. In other words, if there is an area of interest, chances are there is a corresponding congressional caucus.

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