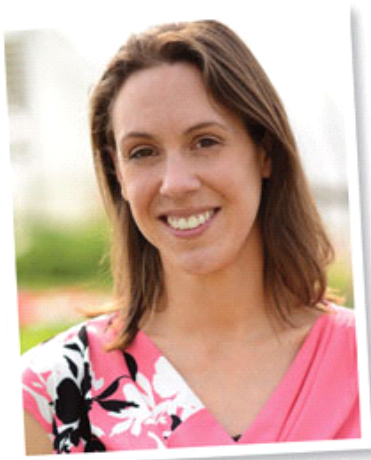


Columns

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Let's Talk Politics

Jennifer Polanz



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Wait, before you slam the magazine closed or go searching for something else, hear me out. Our country is in some turmoil right now. We've got a pretty divided nation when it comes to quite a few issues. Many of these issues affect our businesses in the near term and long term.

I still feel like we've got a pretty great thing going with this America experiment. We're at almost 241 years and, you know, there's always room for improvement. So how do we come together on some of these issues? I think part of it is not burying our heads, and instead, coming together to talk rationally about it.

For example, in my mind I come back to the minimum wage issue.

Though we didn't ask about it in our Wage & Benefits Survey—our question was targeted more to overtime regulations—many people still wanted to talk about how minimum wage increases would affect them. Some said it would put them out of business and that could be true. Others say their employees can't live on the minimum wage now and that an increase is long overdue. That also could be true. See what I did there? Both sides of the coin.

Here's two more scenarios that also could be true: one minimum wage employee is a 17-year-old kid who just got a car and now he works at the local garden center to pay for gas, insurance and maybe the occasional Friday night pizza. Another is a woman who worked at a local factory that just shut down and got a minimum wage job at the garden center to try and feed her family and pay rent. Both of these scenarios can be true.

So what's to be done? These are complex issues that require more than sound bytes and posturing. They require discussions at all levels with small businesses (which make up 54% of all U.S. sales). They require us (the collective us) to become more involved than ever in state and national organizations and to engage representatives at all levels. We call out the dates for Society of American Florists' Congressional Action Days, where growers, retailers and florists can engage their Congressional representatives personally. It's a great opportunity to make your voice heard.

Along with getting vocal, it's important to listen. Back in June at the Garden Centers of America Summer Retail Tour in Portland, Jeff Stone of the Oregon Association of Nurseries spoke about his state adopting the \$15 minimum wage and its impact (still undecided as of yet). He said the key to talking with local lawmakers was to listen to their reasons for the increase. It wasn't to just give people more money. It was to solve bigger problems like homelessness and poverty, and the issues that come with those. These are more nuanced challenges than just giving people a raise. Listening is key to truly understanding the real problem.

We listened to our readers as they responded to our 8th annual *Green Profit* Wage & Benefit survey. Also, as a companion piece, Editor Ellen Wells took a leap into the world of Human Resources for the first in a four-part series on navigating HR in the workplace.

To transition a little, listening carefully also can be helpful in the landscape trade. Sometimes consumers say one thing, but are really asking for another. A prime example is "low-maintenance" landscapes. Find out why I put that in quotes.

In the end, we're all part of this big experiment together. It's okay to be vocal, but don't forget to listen first. **GP**