

General Election 2020

IDA Guidance For Engaging With Candidates In The Forthcoming Election

Introduction

General Elections provide a unique opportunity for citizens to engage directly with the political process and to promote their opinions, interests and concerns to aspiring members of Dáil Eireann.

Most politicians are, by nature, extrovert and are more than willing to engage with members of the public to discuss issues of interest. This is even more the case at election time when their whole life revolves around campaigning, meeting constituents, knocking on doors, listening, defending, promoting policies and asking for votes.

In elections like the current one, candidates are particularly conscious of the views of influential members of their communities; doctors, dentists, shopworkers, teachers and so forth.

Candidates are aware that people in these types of public facing roles have a huge level of interaction with other voters in the constituency and, perhaps, a greater influence as a result.

In response to requests from members, this circular includes some tips and advice on best practice when engaging with politicians at election time.

Don't be Shy

Never more so than during an election, politicians want to talk and are more than willing to listen.

The biggest frustrations for campaigning politicians is the unanswered door, the unopened hand or the turned head. If they meet someone on their canvass who is willing to engage with them, they will be more than willing to listen to your arguments and engage on the issue at hand.

Canvass / Meeting?

Not all the candidates will visit you why not reach out to ask them for a one-on-one meeting (early in the day will suit candidates better – before they go canvassing). If possible, ask them to come to your surgery; a dental surgery provides an impressive backdrop and will add extra weight to your arguments. If possible, invite other members of your staff to meet with the candidates too – again it will add weight to the engagement.

If it is not possible to meet a candidate face-to-face, write to them outlining your concerns and request a response before polling day. Explain that you will communicate their response to your colleagues in the practice.

Be Focussed

During a campaign, politicians will be hoping to meet hundreds of potential voters each day. Therefore, it is critical that when you engage with them, you are focussed and to the point.

Don't prepare a long list of demands, keep your points brief and direct. Be clear about

the problem(s) you are facing and the solution(s) you propose.

By all means reference the position of the Irish Dental Association and the questions the IDA has put to the politicians nationally. Your efforts will reinforce the role of the

organisation and provide a reference point for further engagement if necessary.

Use Personal Stories

If you want to impress campaigning politicians, help them to relate to your issues by using personal stories; the impact of current policies on patients and young people, the challenges you are facing in your working life and how it impacts your patients, the problems being stored up for young people and so on.

Have you experience of lengthy waiting lists your patients are facing locally? What impact has the closure of HSE dental clinics or staff shortages in dental hospitals or other publicly funded referral services had on your patients.

Remember, put the patient at the centre of your stories while emphasising your commitment to the highest standards of care and within a practice which receives no state support and is facing significant operating costs.

Emphasise Your Workload

It is important that candidates realise the heavy workloads which dentists are dealing with. It can also be useful to emphasise how many patients you see each week/month/year. In the case of children, explain the challenges posed in terms of time involved in treating children and explain how you feel about the proposal to shift care for children away from (a grossly understaffed) public dental service into general practice. Talk about the complexity of some of the cases you see

Don't Assume Knowledge

Most candidates are generalists, not specialists. Assume that they have no more knowledge about dentistry than any other member of the public has. Do not assume that the candidates of a particular party even understand or know their own parties position on relevant issues. Make it easier for them to agree with your position by simplifying your arguments and keeping them personal.

Don't Be Too Discouraged (or Encouraged!)

Campaigning is hard. Candidates are under pressure. So don't be too discouraged (or too encouraged) by what you hear from them. The important thing is that the issue of dentistry registers with them and they appreciate that people feel strongly about it.

You Are Not Expected to Commit Your Vote

Be clear that whatever a candidate says to you, you are not expected or required to commit your vote to him/her in response. Candidates will be delighted to hear that you have listened to what they have said, are encouraged (or not) by same and will bear it in mind when voting.

Keep in Touch

You may meet candidates in this election who will go on to have many years' service ahead of them. If you engage with them now, it may be possible to resume contact with them after the election and ensure that you retain an ability to contact them about issues of concern.

□

