

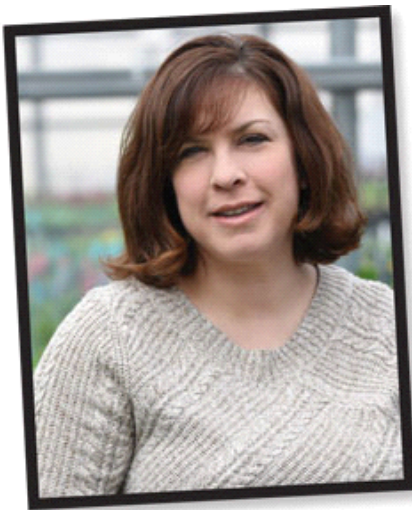
GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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Under the Big Top

Jennifer Zurko



JENNIFER ZURKO

When Showtime first aired, “The Circus,” their docu-series about American politics, my first thought was that the name of the show was brilliant. There really is no better way to describe what goes on in Washington D.C.

Think about it ... When I went to the circus as a little kid, I remember being overwhelmed by all of the sights and sounds. There was so much happening, I didn’t know where to look—like watching 10 people play tennis on the same court all at once.

There were entertainers performing amazing feats that you thought took a lot of guts to attempt—jugglers, tightrope walkers, unicyclers, trapeze artists.

The clowns were supposed to be funny, but I’ve never been a fan. I always found them to be kinda creepy and were trying too hard to get me to laugh. I was skeptical of what they were selling and I wasn’t buying.

And in the middle of all of that is the ringmaster, who can control your whole attention with distracting gestures and loud proclamations of “amazing!” “spectacular!” and “extraordinary!”

Then you’re home, lying in bed thinking, “Wow, that was crazy and awesome all at the same time.”

Yes, circus is the perfect term for an imperfect government that has the ability to inspire and amaze us, while also making us fearful and nervous. Not all of the same people play the same parts in the circus all the time—sometimes you find yourself up on the tightrope or juggling knives; other days, you’re jumping through hoops on fire or staring into the lion’s mouth.

I think of our industry advocates like that. Led by Craig Regelbrugge, AmericanHort’s legislative team are the ringmasters for us—they’re our voice on the Hill, making sure the people we elected to represent us hear us loud and clear. But like the other performers in the D.C. circus, they play different roles depending on what’s happening at the time.

For instance, when I visited the team in November, it was at the height of them working to get the Farm Workforce Modernization Act passed through committee. Craig was jumping through hoops to get other House members to support the bill, Tal was juggling multiple coalition meetings, Tristan was performing communication acrobatics, and

Jill was walking her research tightrope between fundraising and working with government agencies. You can read more about how they handle the circus. (I also scored a quick interview with Congresswoman Abigail Spanberger, one of the main supporters of the bill.)

There are other ways you could describe our political system, I suppose. I've heard people call it "corrupt," "crooked" and "scandalous," which it can be and is sometimes, but I personally don't think that's fair to the principled elected officials and civil servants who work tirelessly because they feel a true sense of patriotism and duty, regardless of party. I've been covering government affairs for our industry exclusively for a couple of years and I'm learning that not all of the apples are bad. And that it also depends on how you classify a bad apple—these days, what one considers rotten, the other thinks is delicious.

So while you're trying to avoid turning on the news or tapping into Facebook because you just can't handle the D.C. circus, at least you can be comforted in the fact that AmericanHort's advocacy team is working to tame the elephants and donkeys. They do this willingly, knowing how much trust you place in them, and they're proud and passionate. We're lucky to have them. **GT**