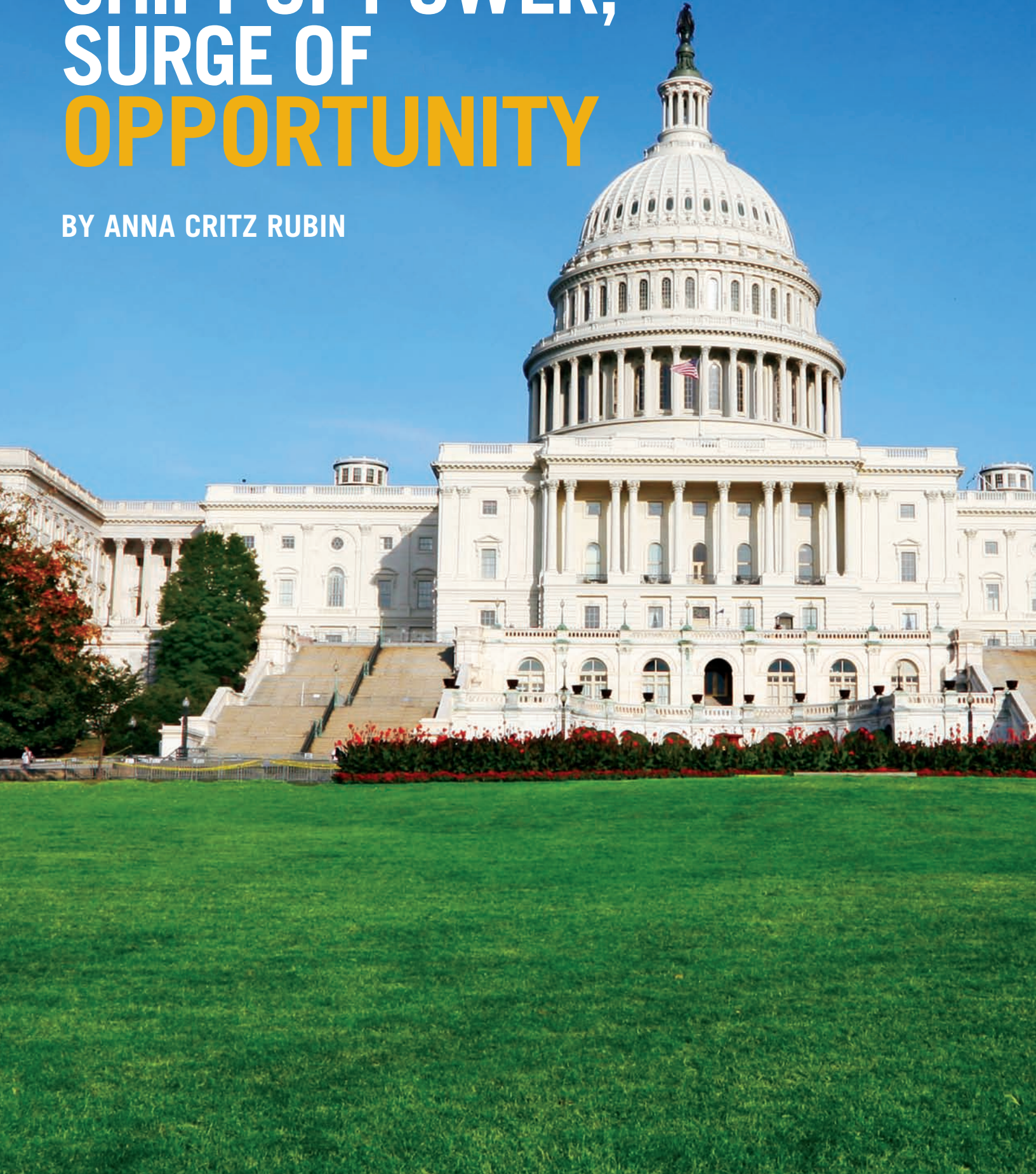


SHIFT OF POWER, SURGE OF OPPORTUNITY

BY ANNA CRITZ RUBIN



FRESH FACES ARMED WITH NEW PRIORITIES ARE SETTLING INTO FEDERAL AGENCY OFFICES IN WASHINGTON, D.C., TO SUPPORT THE NEW ADMINISTRATION. STRATEGIC CORPORATE AND ASSOCIATION LEADERS RECOGNIZE THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT ACCOMPANY THIS SHIFT IN POWER AND ARE PLANNING AND ACTING TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE AT THE TABLE. CARPE DIEM IS TODAY'S MANTRA FOR THOSE WHO WILL BE SHAPING POLICY AND LEADING NEW INITIATIVES FOR MONTHS AND YEARS TO COME.

Many associations already have engaged with our new leaders, but most are standing at this intersection of preparation and opportunity waiting for a green light.

President Obama has made his priorities clear — economy, energy and education. Add to this the Middle East conflict, and it is clear that Obama's team needs the guidance and wisdom of industry leaders in his first 100 days. The question is not *if* this guidance will be sought, but *who* will be there to offer it.

CAPTURING OPPORTUNITIES TO SHAPE POLICY

Association executives spend their days talking to industry leaders, understanding industry challenges, researching and developing solutions, and providing a platform for the exchange of ideas throughout their respective industries. Most have firsthand experience with what is wrong, yet every day they touch what is right and what is working on a national, state or local level. Their perspective is critical to ensure that what is working shines brightly and is visible to our leaders and our nation. We know there are no quick fixes for the challenges facing our nation that can be highlighted in a 30-second sound bite. But together, guided by those with innovative ideas and strong experience, solutions can be offered and federal resources allocated, to tackle these challenges for both today and the future.

Proven leadership, respect within and connections throughout the industry, and depth of experience are needed today more than ever at the tables shaping public policy and federal initiatives in Washington. Capturing this opportunity is on the mind of every association executive regardless of the industry he or she serves. Since Election Day, I have had conversations with an array of associations looking for guidance to navigate the Washington "system," understand and recognize opportunities, and incorporate their programs and services into federal solutions — impacting policy, gaining visibility and financial support. Here are a few recommendations:

- **Explore the industry you serve through the new priorities — economy, energy, education.** Where does the industry fit on the spectrum? Is the connection obvious? The services most, if not all, associations provide clearly connect to these priorities as they relate to professional development, research and advocacy. Communicating with, organizing activities for and gathering recommendations from industry leaders is most easily done through an association that is valued and supported by its industry. Craft a message that directly ties

your association to these priorities, connecting what you do to the members you serve.

- **Examine the programs and services your association provides.** Helping workers find new jobs in high-need industries and acquire new skills for new technologies is central to Obama's economic stimulus package, energy plan and education initiatives. Billions of dollars are expected to be allocated to address these needs. It is more effective and expedient to channel resources to existing training and career development programs in targeted areas than to create brand new programs. The challenge for federal policy makers is finding these programs and understanding their potential. An association's programs that are valued by members, best practices or processes worthy of duplicating, or local and state success stories, need to be packaged and presented. Flip on the neon switch of what your association does best.
- **Identify federal leaders and policy makers within one degree of separation to your association.** The majority of new faces in the new administration are not new at all. There is a proverbial revolving door in public policy circles among political appointments, congressional staff, association leadership and corporate public and government affairs. A "trading places" of sorts is common in a presidential transition, producing a high likelihood of a direct connection to association staff, board of directors or key members. These connections are your connectors.
- **Build partnerships and coalitions with members, other associations, the education pipeline and community organizations**



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to lead the development of a comprehensive solution for areas the new administration targets. Be willing to modify, expand or reshape your current programs to build the best solution. Solutions that are clear and measurable are easy to fund and spotlight at the federal level.


FEDERAL FUNDING TIPS

The concept and reality of federal funding is confusing and alluring. The process is black and white, and it is gray. And this is why some revel in the pursuit and others watch and wonder. In general, federal funding is distributed through three categories: congressional appropriations, formal solicitations and discretionary grants.

- Funds appropriated by Congress through legislation are distributed and monitored by the appropriate federal agency (Department of Labor, Department of Energy, etc.). The desirable portion of congressional appropriations, and that for which lobbying efforts abound, are earmarks.
- At the agency level, formal requests for proposals are released for programs and services and may be monitored at www.fedbizopps.gov.
- Agencies also have discretionary funds that may be granted to address national initiatives identified by the president and the president's cabinet. National demonstration projects or programs with an unrivaled uniqueness may fit this category.

Examples of the \$288 million in grants awarded in the Bush administration's High Growth Job Training Initiative may be found at <http://www.doleta.gov/BRG/HGJTIGrantees>.

It is my experience that association services and capabilities fit well in discretionary grants for high-priority initiatives. Associations with a well-packaged solution for which federal support would make a national demonstration for others to duplicate or implement may catch the attention of policymakers. Explore the programs or services your association currently has or has the capability to quickly stand up for which federal resources could help expand to reach more individuals, communities or states; be duplicated in other companies or industries; or provide statistics or research data to illustrate or clarify challenges and trends.

The winds of change have swept through Washington, and as the dust settles opportunities abound. The impact will be felt by every industry throughout our nation. Package your message and your members with a strategy for engagement for the first 100 days and beyond. 

Anna Critz Rubin is vice president of connections for The Communicators. Rubin's 20 years of leadership and consulting with associations and nonprofit organizations in Washington, D.C., and the Midwest includes her experience as special assistant at the U.S. Department of Education. She may be reached at anna@communicators.com.