



# A Call to Public Service

## Retailers Do Double Duty as Politicians



**A**tumultuous, heated presidential campaign is at the forefront of U.S. politics right now, but some politically active retailers offer perspectives on government involvement that supersede parties and candidates.

Sidestepping the widely debated topics of this election cycle, these store owners spoke with *Hardware Retailing* about what it means to spend time as public servants and what businesspeople uniquely contribute as political leaders.

On the next few pages, you will hear from retailers who have found ways to juggle business, work in local and state governments, and make a difference.

In this story, a political party chairman and a city alderman both share why they got involved in government,

how their business experiences have helped them be strong public servants and why it's important for other independent business owners to be active politically.

In this article, you will read Q&As with Jared Littmann, who is a store owner and serves as a local city alderman, and Jeff Cardwell, who doubles as a retailer and chairman of the Indiana State Republican Party.

For yet another perspective on working both as a retailer and a politician, visit the [TheRedT.com/stine-qa](http://TheRedT.com/stine-qa) for an online-exclusive Q&A with Dennis Stine, president and CEO of Stine Lumber in Louisiana. Stine has served as a state legislator and as a financial officer who worked directly with the governor of Louisiana.

Then, head to the Last Word on Page 86 to learn about business issues that six states will be voting on in November.



Jared Littmann, owner of K&B True Value in Annapolis, Maryland, has spent the past five years in his current role as a city council member, which is also called an alderman. Littmann talks about his position, how his passions helped drive his political goals and more.



**Hardware Retailing (HR): How did you get involved in politics and why?**

**Jared Littmann (JL):** As long ago as high school and college, I've been interested in politics. I have been involved in campaigns and found the policy perspectives interesting. While politics involves fundraising and campaigning, I've been more interested in the public side, like legislation.

I went to college for an environmental engineering degree and later I went to law school, with a focus on environmental law. After practicing law for a few years, I got into retail by getting into my in-laws' hardware business.

When a position opened for a city alderman, I applied and, thanks to my legal experience and business experience, I was selected as alderman for Ward 5 in the city of Annapolis. I ran for election after that one-year term was served and won a

four-year term. I have about 16 months left of this term. I have decided to not run again.

**HR: Why do you think independent business owners should get involved in politics?**

**JL:** First off, there is no doubt that getting involved in local government is time-consuming. And since business is also time-consuming, not everyone has the time to put into it.

Running the business should remain a top priority, as well as family. However, if you decide you do have the time, I have zero doubt local politics has a great impact on the community. Local politics affects the local economy, affects the general feelings of the community and more. If you care about your community and feel you have something to offer to help it thrive, getting involved politically is a wonderful opportunity.

**HR: What do business owners uniquely contribute to government?**

**JL:** First and foremost, business owners generally have a better understanding of management and budgeting.

Retailers have experience in payroll expenses, managing taxes and the different requirements for safety.

Plus, by having business experience, you have a greater appreciation for how hard it is to generate revenue and maintain a happy population.

**HR: What skills from running an independent business make you well suited for government?**

**JL:** One of the skills that I bring is critical thinking. Being comfortable with numbers, accounting and budgeting is also important.

Plus, being able to communicate effectively in person, through email and during city council meetings is a very important skill I bring.

**HR: How do you recommend getting started in local government if retailers want to be advocates for business in their communities?**

**JL:** I think there are so many different ways to get started. There are two paths I would highlight. One would be local political parties. You don't necessarily need to decide. You could attend events from Republican, Democrat, Green and others to determine who you best associate with.

The other track is to figure out the issues you care about, like education and environmental issues. Get involved in the issues that matter to you. Meet with government officials and talk to people in government roles to share your concerns and issues.



In 2013, Jared Littmann is sworn in as an alderman in Annapolis.

**HR: In what ways has your involvement in politics made you a better retailer?**

**JL:** Being involved in politics has opened my eyes to people I wasn't aware of before. It's created new friendships and relationships and broadened my horizons. It's also made me more aware of the issues facing local communities. I wasn't aware of all the issues and how they affected my business before.



**Jared Littmann** has worked with, from left, Sen. John Astle; Mike Busch, Maryland speaker of the House; and Josh Cohen, former Annapolis mayor.

**HR: How have you made your community better through your political involvement?**

**JL:** I think I've made my community better in various ways. I've consistently defended the cautious use of taxpayer money. I try to protect citizens' money as if it was my own.

I also think I've made a positive impact on education by introducing and passing legislation to help students in public schools.

Another area I'm proud of is the work I've done to help protect natural resources and forests. I want to make sure we consider the impacts of decisions on our local environment.

**HR: In a divisive political climate, how can retailers be activists without hurting business?**

**JL:** The way I do that is by focusing more on the issues rather than the political parties. I try to think about if it's good for local citizens, not about what political party it's associated with.

Before I was in politics, when people wanted to put signs up in front of the business, I said yes, no matter who the person was aligned with. Now I don't post anything. I don't want people to link my business to a political party.

***HR: What are some ways retailers can be active in local government, even if they aren't interested in serving in elected positions?***

***JL:*** Only a small percentage of people attend their city council meetings and talk to their local officials. But the few people who do go get to express their opinions, and we'll listen. They have better access to making changes, and it's a great way to get face time with your elected officials to let them know about an issue you have.

You can also go and meet with people in governmental positions in the community, like the planning office or police department. Set up appointments to discuss concerns and share ideas.

Joining a local business association, like a local chamber of commerce or rotary club, is another powerful way to be active in the local government.

***HR: What are the pros and cons of serving as an elected official while operating your own business?***

***JL:*** The biggest con is the amount of time involved. It takes me away from business. And while I haven't had a situation where a decision I've made would turn customers away, there is always that potential.

The pros outweigh the cons, however. The time is manageable; it's like having a part-time job. This has allowed me to give more chances to various employees, letting them figure out how to accomplish goals. I'm not micromanaging, because I don't have time to, and I trust and manage more efficiently that way.

Plus, the community views me and my business in a reciprocal kind of way. People shop here to support a local business and they appreciate my position in city government. They like being able to talk to me about local issues when they stop by.

***HR: What advice would you offer a fellow retailer who is running for an elected position?***

***JL:*** Be who you are. Whatever issues have gotten you as far as you have, those are the issues you should stand for. Don't back something if your true interests lie somewhere else. You'll be more successful with your own perspective.

If you do run for an elected position, talk to your management and staff to share the impact that will have. This is an opportunity for more autonomy, but they'll still have your support. Whatever they need, let them know you'll be available to them, and that the business is still a top priority.



Jeff Cardwell, owner of Cardwell Do it Best Home Center in Indianapolis, is the current state chairman of the Indiana Republican Party. He began his political career in 1980 as a volunteer for the Ronald Reagan campaign.



**Hardware Retailing (HR): Why did you get involved in politics?**

**Jeff Cardwell (JC):** In 1976, I started in the hardware business and building material business. The store owner at that time was heavily involved in the political cycle. He encouraged me to get involved.

My grandfather had held political office, which influenced my interest in politics. My boss at the time was the reassurance that I needed to get more involved.

They would always say, "Politics matter." Everything is political, whether it's church, family or politics. Politics is a part of everyday life. It was a time America needed change and a time that people felt that the American dream had died. Iran held our hostages. Unemployment and interest

rates were at an all-time high. There were a lot of tensions.

The most important part of it is that you have an opportunity to make a difference. You can make your voice be heard on a platform when people are listening. And the time people are listening is during election cycles.

Ronald Reagan led on national security and economic growth—issues that were of concern to me as a young person. I watched him get elected. I saw him take action, and soon I saw really good results. We saw interest rates and unemployment fall. Iran released our hostages.

I thought my voice mattered. I felt that I made a difference.

In the private sector, the free markets work best when government does its job of providing public safety and infrastructure. We are the economic engine that provides the government with the resources it needs for infrastructure and public safety. It's our tax dollars and economic growth that fund local government and schools.

**HR: Why do you think independent business owners should get involved in politics?**

**JC:** A lot of times, the small businessperson wears many hats. They're able to have a really



On behalf of the Indiana Republican Party, **Jeff Cardwell** nominates Donald Trump for president in July at the Republican National Convention.





In the 1980s, **Jeff Cardwell** worked with both of Ronald Reagan's presidential campaigns. Seeing the changes Reagan led as president inspired Cardwell to continue being politically active.

well-rounded perspective on what makes business thrive. As the political people develop policies, they need to understand the impact they have, positive or negative, on businesses and communities.

You have people who have never owned a business and they have great intentions, but great intentions can have terrible results.

Business owners, with their own personal stories, are priceless. It's the experience of daily life and of working with people of all walks of life that can be the biggest assets to policymakers.

**“I feel like every hardware, home center and independent store owner should be involved, because the best way to predict their future is to create it.”**

Experience matters. Private sector business owners matter, and nothing can replace their wealth of experience.

Every business owner is involved in the political cycle, whether they want to be or not. They should make things happen instead of wondering what happened, after the fact. That's where I feel like every hardware, home center and independent store owner should be involved, because the best way to predict their future is to create it, and they can create it by being involved.

It's important to be involved. Government has a really important role to play. Public safety, infrastructure and economic growth are all very important to our local businesses.

***HR: How do you make time to be politically active?***

***JC:*** Passion is the fuel that drives the engine. You have to get involved in what you're passionate about. You always find the time for the things that fuel your passion.

Politics is my hobby, just like other people have hobbies and sports. The passion is the fuel

that motivates me, and it's results that really develop that passion.

When you've been involved in a campaign and see positive results, it encourages you to do more.

***HR: In what ways has your involvement in politics made you a better retailer?***

***JC:*** It's absolutely affected every aspect of my business. Communication is the key to success. Working together—that's the economic growth that raises the tide for all boats.

You can bet that in any community that's successful, there's good public-private communication happening.

***HR: How do you recommend that retailers be activists without hurting their businesses?***

***JC:*** I think it's all about the personal approach. It's very important for people to see that you're coming to the table with the greater good in mind, looking for solutions for your community. My business is located in a heavily registered Democrat area, and yet I'm a Republican. I found that it did not hurt my business at all. ➡