



SIIA President &amp; CEO Mike Ferguson

# SIIA ENDEAVORS

SIIA Endeavors: On the Record with  
SIIA President & CEO Mike Ferguson

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*he Self-Insurer* Editor Gretchen Grote sat down with SIIA President & CEO Mike Ferguson for a wide-ranging interview to talk about how the association continues to evolve and play an increasingly important role in helping its members be successful in the self-insurance marketplace.

**GG: Now that we are in the fourth quarter, how would you describe the year SIIA has been having so far?**

**MF:** I am very pleased with how 2022 has been playing out from a SIIA perspective. Given that this has been the first full year with COVID in the rearview mirror, we have been very excited to have such great participation for our in-person events during the first half of the year. The association's volunteer committees and task forces have also been able to get to in-person meetings, so our various membership service initiatives have gotten back on track.

**GG: SIIA rolled out three new events earlier this year, how did they go?**

**MF:** Yes, we wanted to come out strong this year with fresh programs. We were very pleased with the results and that we were able to diversify our educational and networking offerings and therefore provide greater value to the membership.

First up was the new Transparency Forum. We created this event in response to the fast-evolving regulatory environment to help our members get prepared for how the self-insured health care marketplace is being affected.

We were then very excited to produce the SIIA Future Leaders Forum, designed specifically for the association's younger members. We held a virtual SFL event last year, so this was a natural next step. Participation was excellent, with nearly 200 young industry professionals from around the country attending. We were also pleased that 12 member companies supported the event as corporate sponsors.

The third new event was SIIA's Corporate Growth Forum. This was developed given the pace of mergers, acquisitions and other corporate financial transactions taking place within the self-insurance industry. We felt there was a need and opportunity to educate SIIA members about these transactions and to help them connect with various sources of capital if and when they are ready to take that step.

Based on the success of each of these events based on attendee feedback, they will be back next year in 2.0 versions. We expect to announce our 2023 calendar of events soon so everyone should watch for this.

**GG: This brings us to the National Conference here in Phoenix this month. Is there anything you would like to highlight about this event?**

**MF:** Well first, we are excited to be back at the JW Marriott Desert Ridge as this is probably the favorite location with our members. This will also be the fully in-person National conference post-COVID so it's great to get back to this format and bring everyone together with the theme of "Engage."

That said, there are some new features that are worth highlighting.

First, we have incorporated several "Engagement Accelerator" sessions as part of the educational program. These will be open discussion forums focused on various hot topics and will be unique opportunities for industry professionals from around the country to learn from each other in very organic settings.

The conference will also include educational content and networking events specifically for younger SIIA members as part of the association's Future Leaders initiative. Based on early registration data, it looks like we will have the largest contingent ever of future leaders at this event.

One last thing to mention is the return of SIIA's famous conference party, and this year's could be the best ever based on what our team has come up with. It's a great way to end the conference and will offer a truly unique networking experience.

**GG: You have made a few references to the Future Leaders, can you provide our readers with a status report on this initiative?**

**MF:** Let me first say that this remains one of the association's most important strategic initiatives as the generational shift continues to accelerate in our industry. And in fact, we've accelerated things this year to make a more meaningful impact.

As I mentioned earlier, the inaugural SIIA Future Leaders Forum was a big success and that has provided additional momentum.

A few months ago, the board of directors challenged the Future Leaders Committee to develop the equivalent of a business plan to help guide the evolution of this initiative in the coming years. I am pleased to report that the committee is making great progress and we expect to make announcements soon on what younger members can expect from SIIA in 2023 and beyond.

**GG: Turning to other committee news, can you tell us about the Transparency Committee?**

**MF:** Of course. This was originally a task force we put together last year to help guide association policy and programs in anticipation of new federal health care transparency regulations. Given the ongoing importance of these developments, the task force was changed to a standing committee earlier this year and works closely with SIIA's professional staff with the goal of helping our members be successful in this evolving regulatory and business environment.

The composition of the committee includes industry experts representing many of the association's major membership constituencies, including TPAs, stop-loss carriers, brokers/consultants and key service providers.

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**GG: Since we spoke last year, SIIA has added two people to its government relations team. Can you tell our readers about them?**

**MF:** Yes, we were very excited to be able to expand our team. To shore up our capabilities at the state level, Catherine Bresler, formerly Vice President and Counsel for a leading TPA, joined SIIA as State Policy & Regulatory Advisor. Catherine brings years of experience on state legislative and regulatory issues, including relationships with key regulatory staff across the country.

The other new addition was Anthony Murrello, a recent graduate of American University, as Government Relations Coordinator. He interned previously in the U.S. House of Representatives for Rep. Mike Sherrill (NJ). Anthony will help manage the day-to-day operations of the Self-Insurance Political Action Committee (SIPAC), as well as supporting federal and state advocacy work.

This team expansion is part of a larger coordinated effort within SIIA to proactively strengthen policy and regulatory engagement on behalf of the self-insurance/captive insurance industry in the years to come.

**GG: You have commented publicly on several occasions about how important it is for SIIA to become more of a major player in terms of political contributions. Can you elaborate a bit on why this should be such a priority and give any progress that has been made to move in this direction?**

**MF:** I have been saying this for the past several years and this objective has continued to move up the list of association priorities.

There are two primary reasons for this emphasis, with one reason being fairly obvious for most members, and the second reason less obvious for those who are not creatures of the DC lobbying world.

The obvious reason, of course, is that it is much easier to make and keep friends on Capitol Hill if you provide financial support for their campaigns. This does not mean that if you contribute to a specific member of Congress that they are certain to vote a specific way, but it's certainly easier to get a meeting with the member and/or their senior staff to explain your issues.

Not so obvious to those outside the beltway is that when an organization establishes itself as a political financial player, it raises your "street cred," so to speak, with other important organizations in town that we may need to partner with on various lobbying efforts.

Our progress has been somewhat slow but steady since we established the Self-Insurance Political Action Committee (SIPAC) about eight years ago as a vehicle for SIIA members to channel political contributions to key members of Congress. Things have accelerated over the past few years thanks to this more dedicated focus, combined with increased staffing resources, and you are now starting to see SIIA really establishing itself as a money player in DC.

Obviously, we are not the biggest name by any means, but it's solid progress that has already directly complemented advocacy efforts and we expect even more positive results after the upcoming election.



**GG: I have seen that SIIA notched two wins in court this year. Can you bring our readers up to speed on this?**

**MF:** For those who may not be aware, SIIA has a long history of either leading or supporting litigation efforts to support the interests of our members when legislative/regulatory advocacy opportunities are not viable. These efforts are financed through the association's Legal Defense Fund (LDF), which in turn is funded by voluntary contributions from the members.

Since we talked this time last year, SIIA's LDF funded the filing of several important Amicus Briefs at the federal and state level. One case was focused on protecting health plan sponsors and participants from nefarious hospital billing practices, with another amicus brief focused on appropriate reimbursement rates for surprise medical billing protections being enacted under the *No Surprises Act*. A third amicus involved the ability of plan sponsors to continue to put in place specialty cost containment opportunities.

I am pleased to report that we received favorable rulings from both the Colorado and U.S. Supreme Courts -- so two more wins for the good guys! Of course, we'll continue to keep our radar turned on for new cases that may require our involvement for the benefit of the industry.

**GG: The association continues to see an increase in its captive insurance membership constituency, so how do you view SIIA's role in this segment of the marketplace?**

**MF:** My view is that SIIA continues to play a unique and useful role in the captive insurance space by integrating its stakeholders into the much broader self-insurance world.

This is important because mid-market employers are becoming increasingly sophisticated in how they manage risk, understanding that they can integrate multiple self-insurance strategies that may include the formation of a captive insurance company. SIIA brings this all together, giving captive insurance professionals more educational, networking and advocacy resources.

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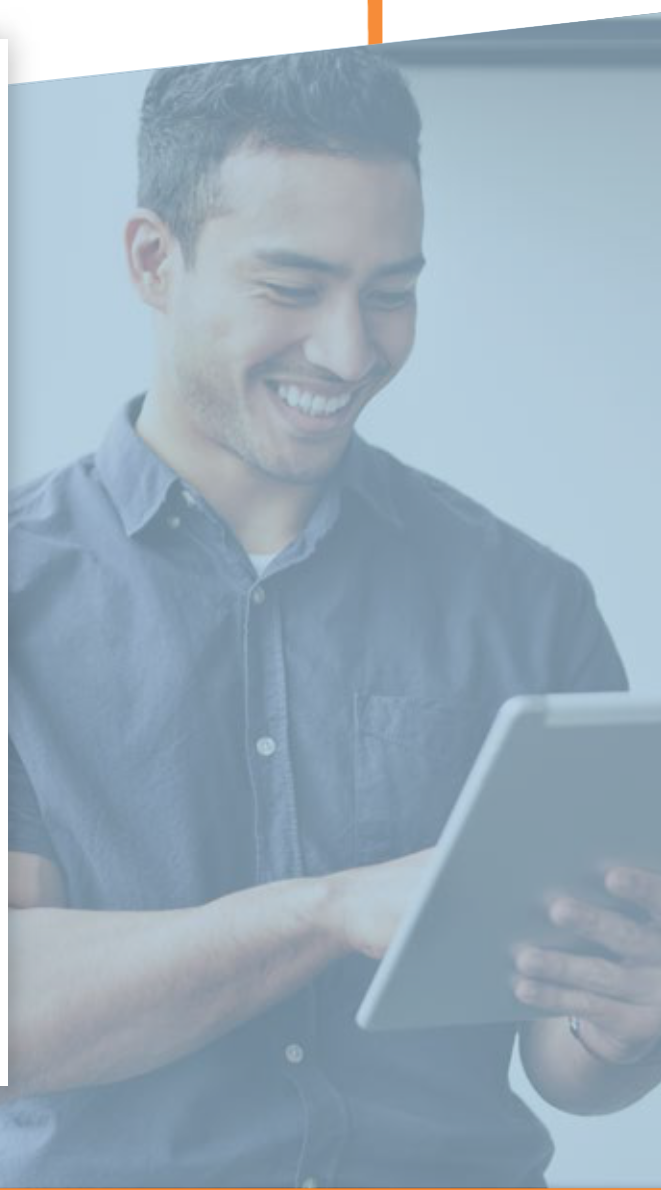
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I am particularly pleased to see how much progress SIIA has made over the past year with political advocacy in Washington, DC to better position the captive insurance market segment with key policymakers.

Unfortunately, many of those who influence the legislative and regulatory process affecting captives, have minimal or no understanding of why an increasing number of employers rely on them to deal with risk management strategies. We are making real progress and look forward to even more positive results in 2023.

**GG: Switching gears just a bit, can you update our readers about Canoe, SIIA's on-line educational platform?**

**MF:** Canoe's value continues to increase as now SIIA members have easy access to nearly 200 pieces of unique content. I like to call it the "Netflix for Self-Insurance" and all employees of SIIA member companies can access it for free. For those members who have not already checked it out, I encourage them to do so at [www.siiacano.org](http://www.siiacano.org). It's really a great benefit that can be utilized by all employees of SIIA member companies.

**GG: There certainly sounds like a lot of exciting things going on at SIIA. What advice would you give industry executives who want to become more active in the organization?**

**MF:** Well of course, become a member if you are not already. Showing up at association events – as they are available-- is a big deal because SIIA is a very interactive and social organization and there is no substitute for being there.

We also recruit members to serve on our various volunteer committees and participate in periodic grassroots lobbying campaigns, which are great involvement opportunities. I like to say we are happy to put our members to work, so be on the lookout for announcements.

For more information visit [www.sii.org](http://www.sii.org). ■



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