



Mike Ferguson, SIIA President & CEO

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 2023 has been playing out from a SIIA leadership perspective. We had great participation in each of our in-person events as well as webinars for the first half the year, which is a great indicator of the vibrancy of any organization.

The association's volunteer committees and task forces also met regularly to work on a variety of projects in support of SIIA's mission to protect and promote the business interests of companies involved in the self-insurance/captive industry.

Of course, we always look at membership numbers as an important datapoint and I am pleased to report that the trend lines continue to be positive with new members being added every month. And these new members represent every segment of our industry.

GG: Since this is the National Conference edition of the magazine, would you like to highlight anything in particular about this event?

MF: Well first, we are excited to be back at the JW Marriott Desert Ridge, which is a favorite location with our members based on feedback received.

As we talk here today, the registration numbers look very strong so it's possible that this year's conference will be the biggest SIIA event ever.

But regardless of the final attendee count, our team has put together a really great program, combining top-notch educational content with multiple networking events.

We are particularly looking forward to the keynote presentation by Futurist Mike Walsh who will be talking about how we should be preparing our businesses to take advantage of the latest advancements in artificial intelligence. And of course, we have another great conference party planned to cap everything off.

GG: How has SIIA's educational event strategy evolved and what should members expect for 2024?

MF: Over the last three years, we have identified opportunities to

develop targeted educational content and related networking environments that provide value to our members and created new events to deliver this value.

These events have included the Health Price Transparency Forum, Future Leaders Forum and Corporate Growth Forum. All had year-over-year attendance growth in 2023 and will be back on the calendar for 2024.

Our inaugural Cell & Gene Therapy Stakeholder Forum was so popular this year that it was actually sold out, so it will also be back next year with more space!

Consistent with this successful approach, we have created yet another new event for 2024 focused on Artificial Intelligence, which we believe will be very well-attended. AI is coming to every other industry so we shouldn't expect to be an exception.

Finally, we are exploring the possibility of bringing back our International Conference for later next year for those companies looking outside the United States for business development opportunities and risk management solutions.

We are planning for a very busy year so please be on the lookout for an event calendar, which will be published soon if not already.



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GG: SIIA has had a busy and successful year on the advocacy and policy front. What should members know and how can they engage?

MF: This year has been extraordinarily busy, and SIIA continues to be at the forefront of educating, protecting, and growing our industry before policymakers and regulators.

On the federal side, we were able to pass the Self-Insurance Protection Act in the U.S. House and continue to help forge legislation to increase price transparency and bring more clarity and data sharing to the Gag Clause provision.

Bringing sunlight to these areas of healthcare costs leads to successful and affordable self-insured plans for employers and plan participants. On the regulatory side, we have filed

comments on captive insurance regulation, in addition to engaging in current proposals related to health insurance and mental health.

On the state side, SIIA was successful in pushing back on stop-loss regulation in Rhode Island, a small group prohibition proposal in New Jersey, and engaged in Nevada as the regulators there crafted a new small group regulation.

SIIA member engagement starts with communication and education, in addition to participation in the Self-Insurance Political Action Committee. Members communicating with the SIIA team, and with policymakers and educators, about not only the role our industry plays, but the opportunities and challenges that are before us is essential. Education, relationships, and ongoing communication are the foundation of a strong advocacy platform.

GG: Let's talk more about SIPAC. 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 the one reason being fairly obvious for most members, with the second reason less



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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 complimented advocacy efforts and we expect even more positive results after the upcoming election.

GG: I very recently have seen that SIIA has participated in several important court victories. What do those mean and what should members know?

MF: SIIA has a long history leading and participating in larger coalition efforts on the legal front to support our members. We couldn't do this without the association's Legal Defense Fund (LDF), which in turn is funded by voluntary contributions from our members.

This year alone, SIIA has participated in four separate amicus filings related to surprise medical billing, seeking to ensure that the negotiation and arbitration process is fair for patients and plans. The legal fight over the No Surprises Act is ongoing, but it's an important one in the face of legislative uncertainty.

More recently, multiple states have undertaken efforts to erode ERISA's preemption powers through PBM legislation enacted in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's Rutledge decision.

Just a few weeks ago, the 10th Circuit Court agreed with an amicus that SIIA participated in, finding that an Oklahoma PBM law restricted a self-insured plan sponsor's ability to develop provider networks and other value-based plan designs intended to lower costs.

SIIA continues to be active in supporting ERISA preemption legislatively, as well as through legal channels where necessary.

GG: It seems like the SIIA look has been more polished this year, can you tell us anymore about that?

MF: Yes, that is correct. We were fortunate to be able to add a senior marketing and communications professional to our team at the beginning of the year and one of his priorities has been to help polish the SIIA brand.

This work has taken place over the last several months with improvement in the quality and consistency of our external communications. A broader strategic branding campaign is also being developed for launch early next year. SIIA has a great story to tell, and we look forward to telling it more effectively in the coming months.

GG: How is the SIIA Future Leaders initiative coming along?

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, so I am pleased to report that things are going great.

Activities are now guided by a very active Future Leaders Committee, so we are confident that this member service offer matches the needs and interests of this targeted demographic.

Our Future Leaders Forum earlier this year was a big success with young professionals attending

from around the country. We even held a first-ever SIPAC Future Leader fund-raiser event in conjunction with the Forum that was very popular.

Many younger members also participated as part of a virtual Mentor Connect event, which matched them with senior industry executives for small group career coaching discussions.

I know more good things are in the works for our younger members and we look forward to making more announcements soon.

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

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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.

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.

Most recently, our captive insurance company developed a survey for industry stakeholders in an attempt to collect important data that has not been available previously. Second year survey results are expected to be reported soon, which I believe will be very valuable for SIIA members and others.

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, so watch for periodic volunteer recruitment communications. I like to say we are happy to put our members to work!

For more information visit www.siaa.org. ■



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