

Leading During Times of Geopolitical Challenges

Employment and Labor

Nonprofit Organizations



Banner photo by Troy Pautz / *Shutterstock.com*

As CEO of a global association headquartered in Washington, DC, I've often found myself in conversation with other organizational leaders around the age-old question of "What keeps us up at night?" Recently, the answers have centered on geopolitical concerns, but more pointedly on the "people issues" they impact. What keeps me up at night? More than anything, it's the safety and well-being of my staff.

While geopolitical challenges are global challenges, for the purposes of this column, I will focus on what's happening in the United States.

People issues are always a priority for me, but as we prepare to elect a new US president, I am especially vigilant. To call the current state of the US political landscape volatile would be an understatement; no matter who is named to the country's top job, the outcome of the 2024 election is likely to cause disruption. In fact, officials in DC began preparing for November's election and January's inauguration a month early, putting up heavy iron fencing and concrete barriers around the White House and US Capitol, and increasing security measures to be deployed between election day on November 5 and the January 20 inauguration.

On January 6, 2025, the electoral votes will be counted, and the presidential election certified. That day will also mark the four-year anniversary of the 2021 insurrection, which has of course led to the increased security measures noted above and more, as well as the day's recent designation as a National Special Security Event by the Secretary of Homeland Security.

While governments prepare against emerging risks, so must organizational leaders. So, I ask you a new question: What people-first policies are you putting into place to make your staff feel safe?

> What people-first policies are you putting into place to make your staff feel safe?

acc president & ceo veta t. richardson

I vividly recall the attack on the US Capitol in 2021; the panic I felt watching events unfold on the news. I even welcomed a colleague who lives on Capitol Hill into the safety of my home that day, as we, like many others, were working remotely due to the pandemic. That said, hybrid work schedules are more prevalent today, and my team commutes a few days a week to an office building located mere blocks from Pennsylvania Avenue — the hub of activity during inaugurations and the preferred site of Capitol protests — and the White House. But they won't this January.

A Brief Guide to Navigating Geopolitical Risk

Taking what I consider to be an unprecedented stance, building management informed our HR team that following warnings from the DC government and the FBI of anticipated disruption and safety issues around January 6 and January 20, the windows on the first floor of the building would be boarded up — and they asked tenants to have employees work remotely through inauguration day. Without hesitation, our team agreed to follow this guidance, and HR quickly informed staff of the decision, not only to reiterate our commitment to keeping them safe, but to allow holiday schedules to be planned accordingly.

The actions of building management, which likely came from a desire to protect tenants, while also limiting their potential liability during what may very well become a volatile situation, really drove home the seriousness of the current climate not only in DC, but throughout the country. While some think of those in the DC metropolitan area as "living in a bubble," the truth of the matter is that the safety issues connected to this election cycle are much broader than one city. Everyone who lives or works in or near a state capital that could be "turned" with respect to the electoral count should be concerned.

My team in DC will work from home in January, and though I know this isn't an option for every organization or employee, I urge those who lead in areas that could be affected (and beyond) to consider a plan of action or shift in policy to help address the very real issues affecting our people.

The US election will have a global impact. Let's not forget the tangible effects such events have on people, our people — and lead in ways that recognize what they are experiencing, while clearly prioritizing their safety and well-being.

Prepare your organization for crises with resources from ACC — Join now!

Disclaimer: The information in any resource in this website should not be construed as legal advice or as a legal opinion on specific facts, and should not be considered representing the views of its authors, its authors' employers, its sponsors, and/or ACC. These resources are not intended as a

definitive statement on the subject addressed. Rather, they are intended to serve as a tool providing practical guidance and references for the busy in-house practitioner and other readers.

Veta T. Richardson



Former President & CEO

Association of Corporate Counsel

Veta T. Richardson is the immediate past president and chief executive officer of the Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC). Headquartered in Washington, DC, ACC is the world's largest legal association dedicated exclusively to serving the interests of in-house counsel. With an international membership of more than 45,000 in-house lawyers at more than 10,000 organizations in 85 countries, ACC serves as the "voice of the in-house bar" for corporate lawyers at 98 percent of the Fortune 100 and 51 percent of the Global 1000.

With more than 60 chapter operations around the world, Richardson's top priorities as CEO involve continuing to increase ACC's global footprint and charting the organization through a strategic plan and vision designed to strengthen its position as the global voice for in-house counsel. Members look to ACC to advocate in support of their rights and interests as in-house counsel, as well as to offer the practice resources, education, global legal and regulatory analysis, and networking opportunities needed to advance their professional development.