



By Randy Tate,
ICA Chief Legislative Strategist

Congress is a unique body in the governing process in the United States, made up as it is of hundreds of diverse and regionally distributed elected legislators. Into the process of legislation, each of the 535 voting Members of Congress bring their competing and contrasting values, priority issues and regional points of view



Randy Tate

and, a party orientation that guarantees that the legislative process will remain as contentious and partisan as it has been for as long as any of us can remember. Still, as Winston Churchill said, "Democracy is

the worst form of government on earth, except for all the others."

Into this process, chiropractic must wade and fight with all its might to get back some of the tax money DCs around the nation send to Washington to fund programs for the public good. If there is one profound understanding I have come to in my years in Washington, which includes a tour as a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives, is that it is our money they are spending up on Capitol Hill. We worked hard for it and we have a right to a voice in how it is spent.

The chiropractic agenda must focus on a few specific items in the current congressional session. The hard fought win late last year that gave chiropractic a permanent role in America's veterans health care system ought to be viewed as a launching pad, not an end in itself.

Clearly, Medicare tops ICA's list and H.R. 2284 is the most likely vehicle by which chiropractic can make major gains in that massive federal program.

Medicare is important both for its own sake, as well as for the model it provides for health care plans, both public and private, around the entire world. The state in which chiropractic finds itself in Medicare is one that cries out for relief. H.R. 2284 will both strengthen the list of reimbursable chiropractic services by adding examinations and x-rays, but it also makes a major strengthening change in the wording of the law by providing that only doctors of chiropractic are authorized to be reimbursed for chiropractic services.

The mood in Washington is a sober one. Elections are looming and uncertainty is facing both parties with the balance of power in the U.S. House of Representatives hanging on a handful of seats. The national security demands and shrinking tax revenues mean that any new spending is going to be looked at with a hard and calculating eye, both to determine whether it is in the public interest, but also how it serves one or the other party in the political process.

Chiropractic has one ace in the hole with respect to the Medicare situation and this card must be played hard and fast. Even in the context of the budget situation, both parties continue to talk about a prescription drug benefit for Medicare beneficiaries.

If this continues on track, chiropractic has every right and a very powerful footing on which to base arguments for also expanding drugless services for those Americans who cannot for biological reasons, or elect not to for reli-

gious or philosophical reasons, take advantage of this new benefit. As Representative John Lewis author of H.R. 2284 told his colleagues when he introduced the bill,

"In this Congress, when the nation is contemplating the investment of billions more in Medicare to fund a prescription drug benefit, I believe it is only fair and proper to make additional provisions for enhanced care for those hundreds of thousands of senior citizens who cannot or choose not to take drugs, for reasons of conscience, religion or their own health situation. Chiropractic, because of its focus on the structures of the spine and nervous system and how they interact, offers one of the most valued elements in the quality of life of our senior citizens, help in maintaining mobility. As well, because chiropractic is a drugless science, it offers a choice that preserves clarity of mind."

The intensifying competition and division between the professions is showing up in legislation as never before. The physical therapists have now had legislation introduced that would provide for direct access for PTs under Medicare. H.R. 3363 was introduced on November 28, 2001 by Illinois Rep. Phil Crane and the PTs are aggressively promoting this legislation.

According to their arguments, this legislation, "By eliminating the referral requirement, a burdensome, unneeded regulation will be done away with and delays in providing care will be removed. By eliminating delay in receiving care, costs will be decreased, functional outcomes will be improved and patients will not be frustrated by an unnecessary visit to the physician."

This far-reaching legislation would remove a layer of medical approval and domination, something that in conceptual terms many in chiropractic might support. In raw reality, however, this legislation will bring PTs one step closer to direct, head-to-head competition with doctors of chiropractic.

Make no mistake, if chiropractic does not stake out and tenaciously defend its unique turf, its role will steadily be eroded because the common domain is rapidly shrinking. These are issues of payment, not scope as such. The dimensions and details of professional scope remain in the hands of the states, where the reserve clause of the U.S. Constitution put them. What we talk about in Washington is, what will the government pay for? H.R. 2284 is where we need to be going and, if we are smart, we will use the PTs own bill as leverage to encourage Congress to pass this very reasonable and responsible chiropractic measure.

With standard medicine on the defensive because of costs and errors, chiropractic is in a rare ascendancy right now since the number of both providers and patients has grown to a point where everyone has heard of chiropractic and most people accept its presence as a norm, even if they don't understand the finer points. What is urgently needed, however, is the personal connection.

When I speak to legislators face-to-face, chiropractic issues are just a vague concept unless they or members of their immediate family have had personal experience with chiropractic, or, the chiropractic community in their district or state has been in enough regular contact for them to have been made aware of our presence. Influence, in an environment like Congress, is a volume thing. It is also most effective if the volume is on-going.

The growing presence of chiropractic's non-MD competitors, most notably the physical therapists, ought to be a shrill and resounding wake-up call to the chiropractic profession and ICA is ringing that alarm bell as loudly as possible. It still requires a willingness on the part of DCs in the field to apply the grass-roots pressure that only the field can apply.

Since the advent of e-mail and 24-hour cable coverage of Congress, the role of the lobbyist has been shrinking. You can find out anything you need to know about legislative schedules and documents on the Internet and you can watch the House or Senate on television and maintain a constant barrage of advice via e-mail to your elected federal legislators, and believe me, this constituent feedback is taken very seriously.

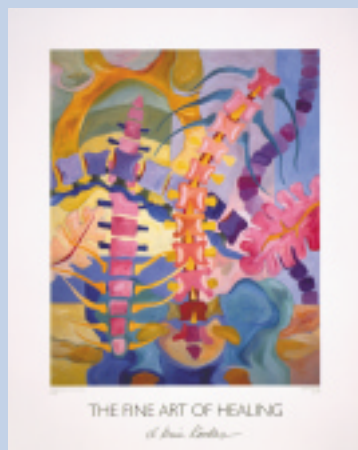
ICA fights hard every day to make chiropractic's voice heard. What are YOU doing? Membership in a national association is a start, but even non-members can go to ICA's website at www.chiropractic.org and get the information, model letters and arguments in support of the key legislative initiatives that need action.

The window for action in the current Congress is very narrow and the time to act is now. Remember, it is your tax dollars they are spending. Do your part to make sure that chiropractic gets back its fair share. The public who depend on your unique services will be the big winners. You owe it to your patients as well as to yourself.

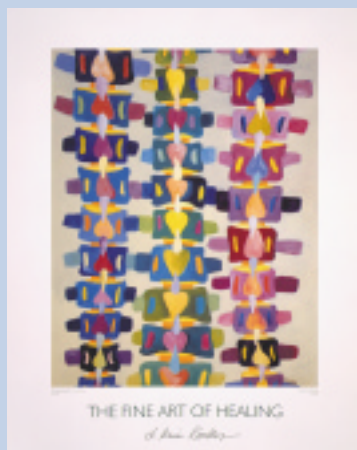
This is my view from Capitol Hill.

RANDY TATE is ICA's chief legislative strategist and is very familiar with the workings of Capitol Hill. He is a former U.S. Congressman representing Washington's 9th district from 1995-1997. As a member of the House Transition Team he served as a Republican Deputy Whip for House Majority Whip Tom DeLay. Mr. Tate also served in the Washington State House of Representatives from 1989-1995. At age 22 he was the second youngest person ever elected to the Washington legislature.

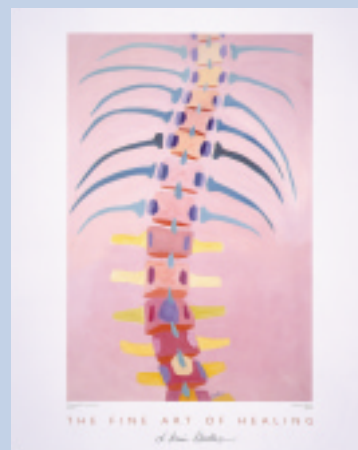
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