



New Congress, New Mountains to Climb

By The Hon. Randy Tate
ICA Legislative Strategist

Members of the 108th Congress came to Washington on January 7th and were sworn in with the usual ceremony. Old hands set to work doing what veteran legislators do, starting with fundraising calls and a local media blitz, while newcomers try to find their offices and their way home at night. This new Congress is unique in recent history because now, both Houses of Congress and the White House are in the hands of the same party, and there are no partisan barriers to accomplishing anything the Republican Party consensus indicates is good for the nation. For the chiropractic profession, the challenges in this situation are new, daunting, and also complicated by the strained economic and diplomatic, not to mention possible military situations the nation needs to address.



Randy Tate

Still, ever forward should be chiropractic's motto. It certainly is at the ICA. ICA recently hosted a legislative summit with other chiropractic organizations and hammered out agreement of a number of priority legislative initiatives. I heartily concur with the selection of legislative goals and believe, in spite of all that will stand in the way, that there is opportunity for chiropractic in the new Congress, if we keep our feet on the ground and don't tie ourselves to any dogmatic position for organizational or political reasons.

ICA is in touch with key members of Congress on possible Medicare reform and will be watching for any opportunity to press the cost-effectiveness of chiropractic, along with the drugless nature of chiropractic care, as an answer to some of the financial pressure

Medicare & H.R. 902

The best example of needing to "get real" is in the Medicare program. President Bush has announced his desire for a "major overhaul" of Medicare and despite the strapped budget situation, many in the Administration, and most in Congress are still talking about a prescription drug benefit for Medicare beneficiaries. Medicare is going to be driven by the economic realities. Falling Social Security revenues, which include the Medicare tax, are coupling with growing numbers of Medicare beneficiaries and the continued upward spiral of health care costs to make the current program unviable.

the program is facing, and to press the wisdom of opening the chiropractic program further by the inclusion of coverage for examinations and x-rays, thus enabling many more beneficiaries effective access to chiropractic as an alternative to the massively more expensive, hospital based, and often specialist care those people are now forced to seek. Good economics and good public policy combine here to give senior citizens the care they want in the first place.

What chiropractic doesn't need are organizations dragging their heels, arguing for program enhancements that will never happen. There is a case to be made that this sort of behavior cost chiropractic the opportunity to expand Medicare to include exams and x-rays in the last Congress, when conditions were far more favorable than they are today.

The obvious case in point is the pursuit of the now demonstrably unattainable goal of H.R. 902, legislation that would have required Medicare to pay for all covered services DCs were licensed in their states to perform. This legislation was introduced in the past two Congresses by Oklahoma Representative Wes Watkins. Mr. Watkins is now retired and the substance of his bill even now more out of reach. Those

who are committed to this legislation should not be expected to relinquish their goal, but should be mature enough to grasp the utility and wisdom of acting now to attain what is possible.

ICA will work for what is possible, with any organization, at any time. The Chiropractic Coalition that has been organized between the ICA, the Federation of Straight Chiropractors and Organizations (FSCO), and the World Chiropractic Alliance (WCA) is a good start.

Presenting a united front

On an immediate front, and on a front on which the chiropractic profession should tolerate no nonsense, it has become obvious that new amendments to federal statutes are necessary in order to provide a basis for doctors of chiropractic to be employed as permanent, career employees by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

While there are other items that will be included in ICA's legislative plan for the new Congress, our focus will also be on building new relationships. Perhaps the most significant fact of the new Congress, beyond the shift in Party control, is the number of new faces. Just sorting out what people know about chiropractic will be a full time job for dozens of activists, working non-stop for the next year. ICA has already been busy meeting the new Members of both Houses, many of whom had ICA's support and that of doctors in their districts prior to their election. Too many, however, have no chiropractic orientation or connection at all. This is chiropractic's greatest mountain to climb, and everyone must play a role.

The tens of thousands of DCs across the United States are more than enough of a constituency to have a line into every office on Capitol Hill. Do we? No. Why not? Because of you! No matter how hard lobbyists or committees may work to orient and educate, as well as mobilize legislators, they are most easily moved by constituent pressure. This cannot be applied from Washington.

Also, the myth of money needs to be dispelled. It is not how much you give, but that you are involved on any level at all. Remember, even the most grossly under financed incumbent has a couple of million in the bank. Members of Congress want financial support to be sure, but what is more important is real-life connections with activists in their states and districts who are in the political process in a sophisticated way for the long haul and are reliable, known quantities with whom they can deal.


Lately, however, too many DCs in the field, and I mean thousands too many, have been content to let George and Randy, and whoever else chiropractic organizations have deployed in Washington to do their work for them. This, regrettably, is a flawed and dangerous notion. I wish I could act and speak with the power of tens of thousands of doctors of chiropractic nationwide. I can't. No one but you can make this impact.

Let's get busy then. Support the new Congressional initiatives that will be introduced in the weeks ahead. Make connections with your Congressional representatives and, equally significant and urgent, their health staff people; urge your local and state chiropractic organizations to get active in Congress and look for real gains, not hold back for a pie in the sky dream, however alluring.

Join ICA! Give to the ICA-PAC and to your representative individually. Do what we cannot. Assume your rightful share of responsibility for legislative progress.

It is up to you!

RANDY TATE is ICA's chief legislative strategist and very familiar with the workings of Capitol Hill. A former U.S. Congressman representing Washington State's 9th District, he was a member of the House Transition Team and 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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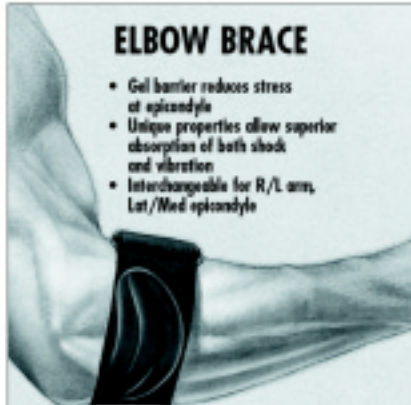
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