



By Randy Tate
ICA Legislative Strategist

The 107th Congress is winding down, with leaders from both parties looking at what, if any significant accomplishments might come out of a post-election session. Such post election sessions are popularly called "Lame Duck" sessions and this is probably a pretty good analogy. As we go to press, the biggest news is what Congress has not done. At the top of this list of non-accomplishments is no major Medicare reform and no prescription drug benefit for senior citizens.

This also means that no reasonable vehicle has been available through



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which any chiropractic Medicare enhancement might have gone forward. This is not good for the chiropractic profession largely because the new Congress that will convene in January will

have no choice but to confront the ugly realities of a slow economy, shrinking tax base and the ever growing numbers of new Medicare beneficiaries limits all options.

It was my hope that all the chiropractic organizations would have seen the urgency of moving quickly to secure even modest gains in what any objective observer should have seen as a closing window of opportunity. Regrettably, the pursuit of an unattainable goal of H.R. 902, legislation that would have required Medicare to pay for all covered services DCs are licensed in their states to perform, doomed any cooperative effort that might, just might, have gained something. This is water under the bridge, but a clear object lesson for the days to come.

All in all, many would argue that the passage of no Medicare bill of any sort was a great victory for sane public policy, and from the chiropractic perspective, certainly for the public health. Any major prescription drug benefit would have added billions to a system barely able to pay for what it covers now. Even more poignant is the role of such drugs in the health of senior citizens, not on the healing side, but on the side of danger and damage.

With half of all emergency room presentations by Medicare beneficiaries related to prescription drugs, with no national programs and procedures to insure that prescribed drugs are properly taken and don't interact in a dangerous manner, or are not really necessary, one might rightly argue that \$80 billion more in prescription drugs in the health care routines of our senior citizens would have been a major public health disaster.

The Legislative Committee and senior leaders of the ICA is planning to convene a legislative summit in Washington, D.C. at which representatives of the World Chiropractic Alliance (WCA), Federation of Straight Chiropractors and Organizations (FSCO) and other groups will look at chiropractic's options in the U.S. Congress and seek to carve out a short list of practical goals. Regrettably, the American Chiropractic Association has declined to participate; a decision that I strongly hope will be re-considered, for the sake of their members and the profession they seek to serve.

Chiropractic's objectives for 2003

What should be chiropractic's objectives in the new Congress? From my

vantage point, Medicare remains a top priority. This battle must be fought and re-fought until an acceptable model is established that covers the basic needs of the program's beneficiaries. This is especially urgent because, for better or worse, the Medicare program continues to be a major model on which health care programs around the world, both public and private, are configured.

Then, new research funds, the Indian Health Service, mandating military commissions for doctors of chiropractic and chiropractic coverage for military dependents and retirees should be pursued. This matter is on the table and I would invite your input. I would like to hear from you. Please contact me by e-mail at chiro@chiropractic.org or by FAX at 703-528-5023. What are your top priorities and concerns?

The new Congress will, as I have noted, have a much smaller resource base and more limited horizons with which to work than the 107th. With no election pressures immediately at hand, the inclination of even friendly Members to sponsor new spending and benefit enhancement programs will be somewhat limited. Chiropractic will need to act quickly to draft and have introduced those target pieces of legislation that are of the highest priority.

We will have to immediately begin to work the committee system, build co-sponsors and to also work on a parallel track with the various federal departments that such bills would impact. Administration opposition is not an automatic given and ICA has already built some unique bridges with agencies that should not be chiropractic's adversaries. We will aggressively work next year to further those inroads and work from both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue to secure chiropractic's legislative agenda.

There will be competition

Competition for Congressional attention will certainly intensify in the new session as budgets shrink and competition between competing health care sectors intensifies. The national dialogue on health coverage and the unin-

sured will also likely heat up as more and more people lose their coverage as they lose their jobs.

This means that the chiropractic presence in Washington must be better organized and more professional than ever before. ICA recognizes that regular contact with key staff people, the provision of new written materials and more carefully developed cost-effectiveness information will be key to any progress we might make next year. These efforts will also need to be accompanied by more and better grass roots action.

Your role

In the post-election period, you as the doctor of chiropractic in the field must find opportunities to address your federal legislators on your home ground, before the new session. Town meetings, political events and other opportunities are already on the schedule. This is your chance to meet your Members of Congress face-to-face. You must seek them out, make appointments, hold "debt-retirement" campaign fundraisers, and do anything and everything you can to get their attention and let them know that the chiropractic profession will be in Washington in January with an agenda to promote the public health and that you will want, indeed, be expecting their help.

Every legislative fight is an up-hill affair. Chiropractic must mobilize, come together and articulate clear, practical goals, centered on better service to the patient. The political process serves the public before it serves the interests of groups like the chiropractic profession, regardless of what kind of cynical picture of Washington you may have. Building our efforts on service to the public is also the best characterization of what doctors of chiropractic do, every day, for people of all ages. Be proud of that record of service. It is your finest attribute.

RANDY TATE is ICA's chief legislative strategist in Washington, D.C. A former Congressman representing Washington's 9th district from 1995-1997, Mr. Tate is very familiar with the workings on Capitol Hill. As a member of the House Transition Team he served as a Republican Deputy Whip for House Majority Whip Tom DeLay. Before his term as a United States Congressman, Mr. Tate served in the Washington State House of Representatives from 1989-1995. At age 22 he was the second youngest person ever elected to that state's legislature.

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