

1998: A Real Chance to Make a Difference in the Congress of the United States

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It is a new year, and time for perhaps even a few new year's resolutions (and despite good intentions, most will not be kept). But a new year always brings with it a kind of "clean slate," a renewal process that transforms the mind, alters the attitude, and provides hope for the soul. It is perhaps the annual equivalent of spring cleaning for the mind, and a revitalization for the spirit.

1998 does offer the chiropractic profession a comparable opportunity to bring about a new year's resolution which it has not previously been privileged to have. The new year opportunity I speak about is that in the upcoming primary elections two doctors of chiropractic are running for Congress. One is a Democrat, one a Republican; one is from Ohio, the other from the state of Washington. Both have an excellent opportunity to emerge victorious.

There are many chiropractors in practice today who have not participated in the political process. The excuses for not getting involved (it's dirty, it's not for me, it's too expensive, too troublesome, too time consuming, etc.) are commonplace today. What makes this attitude difficult for those of us in practice for 30 years or more is that we remember when there was no licensure, no CCE, no positive legislation, no equality for alternatives in the system.

There are two doctors of chiropractic who have decided that it is time to "put their efforts and energies where it will do the most good," undertaking an awesome task to win a seat in the next Congress of the United States. What a wonderful ring that has to it!

The two individuals are Dr. Peter Ferguson from Ohio and Dr. Paul Phillips from Washington state. Some of you may know them, but the important thing is they have made a serious commitment to become members of Congress. Before this column is misunderstood or misrepresented by our adversaries who would like nothing more than to paint these two doctors of chiropractic as going to Congress to be lobbyists for the chiropractic profession, let me state for the record that nothing could be farther from the truth.

These two doctors have, however, recognized that "health care reform" and "health care issues" will be top priorities on the next Congressional agenda. They know that as members of Congress, their voices will add a sense of indisputable realism to the health care debate. They, along with a few other health care providers, despite their lack of seniority, will have great impact upon the debate because Congress respects the voice of those "inside the halls of Congress." These two doctors of chiropractic can bring a voice for all the alternative health care professions. They can voice their concerns about the exorbitant amount of dollars expended on research dealing with the disease model of illness and the lack of dollars expended on the wellness model. They can scrutinize the fine print in legislation and determine who and how it will impact the forgotten health care consumer. They can, by being inside, let those on the outside truly know what the issues are and where to focus the limited resources available to bring about positive changes.

Health care is not their only concern. They will have positions on national defense; the IRS; medical savings accounts; education; Medicare; affirmative action, and other important social and

politically significant issues. This article is not written to lay out their entire political agenda, but merely to spark discussion, debate, and, I hope, action in areas which are significant to our patients and our practices in their immediate quest to win the primary.

Primaries are often won by very few votes, largely because most of the voters wait until the general election and then often vote for the candidate with the greatest name recognition. They may also vote by party line; physical attributes; their positions on single issues; and yes, even such things as character, integrity, family values, ethics, and old-fashioned honesty.

What Can the Profession Do to Help Make 1998 "The Year of the DC in DC?"

One requirement for sure is dollars! Campaigns are costly and unless the primary is won, the national Republican or Democratic campaign committees do not get involved. Local doctors of chiropractic in the congressional districts of each of these doctors should make a concerted effort to do several things.

1. Votes are as important as dollars, and every DC in the respective congressional districts of Drs. Ferguson and Phillips all have a significant patient base. The election is not about Republicans or Democrats: it is about streamlining health care for tomorrow. The election is about patient-centered legislation and how health care will be delivered in the next millennium; how to preserve the doctor-patient relationship currently being destroyed by "managed care," and the greed evident in today's business priority mindset. DCs in the congressional districts of Drs. Ferguson and Phillips should send personal letters to their patients to help persuade them that these chiropractor candidates should be elected because of their concerns about health care issues. This effort alone could make the difference in victory or defeat in a primary election.

Participation in this election should transcend philosophical, ideological and party lines. Focus on putting in Congress voices of reason, voices now absent from the discussion and debate surrounding health care legislation, particularly from those who are health care professionals and have first-hand knowledge of the long-term results improper or poorly crafted legislation can bring.

2. Convince your patients and influential friends to contribute to the campaign. It is far more compelling when a candidate has a broad spectrum of support from cross sections of the congressional district rather than focused support from one segment. The reports which are generated from the financial contributors tell a story that is either convincing and suggest this candidate be taken seriously, or reflects the small base of support and limited possibility for the candidate. Encourage your patients and friends to contribute. Their contributions, however large or small, will create the broad base of support needed.

3. If you know a colleague or have a friend in Ohio or Washington, give them a call and talk to them about this election. Stress upon them the importance of winning the primary. Ask for their support to help our candidates win. By your enthusiasm and your commitment, others will follow by example. This is the time to "act now," before the election is over.

4. Volunteer to work the precincts, work the phones, and be part of a network of volunteers to do the many jobs needed to run the campaign. It is amazing how much your offer of help will be appreciated and badly needed in these times of expensive campaigns.

5. Attend every function you can to not only be part of the "warm bodies" needed to make the appearance and support of the candidate meaningful, but by attending it will enhance your own ability to meet the opinion makers and people of the congressional district. Person-to-person meetings, pressing the flesh and participating will only add personal value to your practice and

community standing.

6. Use your influence. Every DC knows business and community leaders. Take this opportunity to call them, write them, and express your appreciation for any support they may provide to the candidate. The fact that a DC is running for Congress enhances the total community standing for all DCs. Running for Congress is the type of involvement which will provide the kind of social and cultural authority which has been slow in coming to the profession.

7. Get involved in every congressional race across the country. Support incumbents who have been supportive, meet with them, contribute to their campaigns, or help their opponents perhaps get elected. Candidates certainly pay attention not only to who helps them, but how strong the adversary's support. The time to get back to basics and recognize that "all politics is local" is now upon this profession. Our profession has survived and flourished by the political sword. It does, however, cut both ways. This time the potential for significant changes to occur is outstanding.

1998 could be a banner year for the profession. It could be the beginning of a new era of chiropractors in Congress; a new beginning for health care reform to truly view the entire spectrum of health care and not simply focus on what has been the traditional model in a changing era. There is not much time to reflect on whether or not you want to get involved in the process; the primaries will be over before too long. It is a decision that is significant for those in the congressional districts of Ohio and Washington, but also significant for an entire profession, whose collective voice has been lost in the quandary of health care debate, the confusion of benefits for plans vs. patients and the greed of economics emerging victorious over the needs of patients for true health care reform.

Can chiropractic play a role in the next Congress? The answer is always the same. It's up to the profession to meet the challenge with action and determination or sit back and wait for someone else to do the job. In that case, like most new year's resolutions, they won't materialize.

Never before has this significant an opportunity been present to catapult the concept of true health care reform from dreams to reality. This primary truly will mark the dawning of a new day for the potential which can be achieved by a "shared vision," a common purpose and a desire to make it happen.

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