

Flexing Political Muscle

CALIFORNIA CHIROPRACTIC ASSOCIATION LAUNCHES AGGRESSIVE CAMPAIGN

Editorial Staff

Do you feel you have no voice in the political process that shapes your profession? Do you think that watching your state association wage political warfare on your behalf would be akin to witnessing David take on Goliath? Think again. And learn from what the California Chiropractic Association (CCA) has been able to accomplish. Through a well-organized, finely-orchestrated campaign, CCA has been able to play a critical part in shaping the future of chiropractic in California, and has established itself as a political force in state politics.

In 1988, California voters were besieged with initiatives aimed at reducing medical treatment costs and litigation expenses associated with personal injuries resulting from auto accidents. The fine print on many of these proposals spelled disaster for the chiropractic profession, both in terms of treatment parameters and expense reimbursement. That year, CCA mounted a successful fund-raising drive, and raised over \$1 million, to help defeat the detrimental initiatives.

In 1992, CCA's intent is the same: preservation of the profession and protection of doctors' rights to practice. But now the stakes are higher. This year, the CCA has committed to raising \$1.2 million to finance its strategy "Campaign '92: Preserve the Practice." Why the aggressive goal? 1992, more than previous election years, is a critical time in California politics. The passage, in 1990, of Proposition 140, the Term Limits Initiative, and the concomitant redrawing of Senate and Assembly district lines, have guaranteed an unprecedented turnover in legislative seats. The net effect is an urgent need to both become acquainted with many unfamiliar candidates and identify those representatives who are supportive of the profession. Combine this with several legislative proposals that strike deep at the heart of chiropractic and you have the impetus for political activity.

CCA draws its political strength from a well coordinated, united political action committee led by Robert L. Dark, D.C., a dedicated professional who has long aligned himself with CCA and its goals for chiropractic in California. Dr. Dark, the current president of the Congress of Chiropractic State Associations (COCSA), has rallied the membership around this year's campaign. "The success of Campaign '92 will come not from a few dedicated individuals but from the collective effort of the membership. CCA members have what it takes to band together to combat the legislative assaults currently on the table. Together we will make a difference," commented Dr. Dark.

Strategy

In 1983, CCA's political action committee underwent a major metamorphosis. An infusion of new leadership prompted the committee to restructure its funding strategy, which tended to divide monetary contributions equally among incumbent legislators, and embark instead on an aggressive course that puts larger contributions into fewer campaigns. CCA dollars are now targeted to those races where funds can have the greatest impact on the outcome of the election. Public endorsements and contributions are withheld until late in the campaign, when coffers are low and the need great.

This new strategy has a proven track record. In 1988, CCA contributed over \$50,000 to a Democratic challenger against a Republican incumbent during the last month of the campaign, when resources were critically needed, and helped elect the challenger by a thin margin of 200 votes. In 1991, CCA contributed a similar amount, again at the last moment, to help a Republican assemblyman overcome a 5% deficit and defeat a medical physician challenger.

The success of this strategy relies on more than making large contributions at critical junctures. The plan also depends on the active involvement of doctors and chiropractic students who volunteer to walk precincts, make telephone calls to get-out-the-vote, and provide office space for campaign workers.

Recognizing chiropractic's strong base of loyal patients, the CCA provides patient mailers to members and non-members that articulate the profession's position on critical issues.

CCA's political strategy has evolved over the years with input from the association's political consultant and volunteers and has been refined by Garret F. Cuneo, CCA's executive director, who had led a number of political campaigns prior to joining the CCA. Mr. Cuneo said the association's strategy was not for the "faint of heart and certainly not one followed by most PACs." Mr. Cuneo pointed to the chiropractic profession's uniqueness and added, "We can't afford to follow the conventional and safe strategy."

Political Experience

An important aspect of the CCA's success in California politics hinges on the experience brought to the task by Mr. Cuneo. From February of 1981 to January of 1983, he served as special assistant to the secretary of the Federal Health and Human Services Department in Washington D.C. As an assistant to a member of President Reagan's cabinet, he was responsible for assuring the 240 HHS advisory committees complied with the Federal Advisory Committee Act. Many of the advisory committees had research grant jurisdiction, and influenced such component agencies as NIH and FDA. In coordinating these committees, he was also responsible for recommending presidential and secretarial appointments to the committees. These and other experiences have allowed him to understand how bureaucracies function and how this can be used to CCA's advantage.

Gary Cuneo began working in political campaigns as a volunteer with the 1964 Goldwater campaign. In 1966, he worked in the Reagan campaign for governor, and in 1968 for the candidacy of Max Rafferty. He served as a paid staff person for the California delegation of the 1968 Republican National Convention in Miami. In 1970, Mr. Cuneo directed Ronald Reagan's San Francisco re-election campaign for Governor; and in 1971, he led a city-wide initiative drive for an elected school board. His final partisan campaign activity occurred in 1974 when he served as statewide organization director for a Republican candidate to the U.S. Senate. This involvement in actually directing and working in political campaigns is a very important factor in the successful execution of the CCA's 1992 election strategy.

The CCA's component societies play an important role in determining PAC direction in contested races. Local societies are encouraged to interview and query the candidates about important issues to chiropractic. Society candidate recommendations are forwarded to the PAC. This local endorsement is the key to securing monetary support for a campaign.

Through these stratagems, CCA will attempt to duplicate the successes of 1988 and 1990 many times over. From all indications, they are off to a good start. In all likelihood, CCA can expect to be a major contributor to legislative outcomes that are favorable to the profession.

For information on how your state association or local society can be more effective in this year's elections, please contact:

California Chiropractic Association

7801 Folsom Blvd. #375

Sacramento, CA 95826

(916) 387-0177

(916) 325-4855 fax

MAY 1992