

Lobbying during Treatment

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When you have a congressman on the table, you better not talk baseball.

So advises Carlsbad, California chiropractor, Dr. J.J. Heavilin, who recently found the chance to lobby Congressman William Dannemeyer (R-Calif.) on a number of important issues facing chiropractors today.

Dr. Heavilin first met Rep. Dannemeyer, considered to be "one of the ten most powerful representatives on health care issues in the United States," according to Mike Hogan of the American Chiropractic Association, at a San Diego fund-raiser during the congressman's bid for a U.S. Senate seat. Heavilin quickly realized the congressman was not only a patient of chiropractic, but he also understands the lack of legal support chiropractors face, both at the state and federal levels. But more importantly, Heavilin realized Dannemeyer was receptive to bringing about change in legislation to strengthen the chiropractic profession.

Dr. Heavilin met the congressman face-to-face during the fund-raiser, and jumped at the chance to ask about any chiropractic experiences he might have had. Yes, Dannemeyer said he had been adjusted before, although Heavilin was wary of the typical political spiel -- a politician telling his constituent what he wanted to hear. Dr. Heavilin tested Rep. Dannemeyer by asking him to name a chiropractor he has visited, and without hesitation the congressman responded with not one but two names.

"I was pleasantly surprised," said Dr. Heavilin. "His answer made it easy for me to inquire further about his experiences with chiropractic."

At first, Dannemeyer responded indifferently, telling the doctor: "I'm no different than anyone else. My back goes out every once in a while."

It was clear that the congressman sought chiropractic care only during crisis situations, and was not the maintenance type of patient who typically knows you and your staff like family. Obviously, a busy man, the congressmen seemed to believe in the old and common adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

However, a Dannemeyer staffer later called Dr. Heavilin's office to schedule a check-up and adjustment for the congressman the next time he was in town.

"The adjustment went well," said Dr. Heavilin. "He told me he prides himself on maintaining an exercise regimen and keeping fit, and said afterward he felt more flexible and noted his stomach felt better."

After the adjustment, Heavilin really went to work, putting his lobbying cap on and asking him some important questions on pending legislation affecting the chiropractic profession.

"First, I asked him about a bill calling for commissioning chiropractors in the military as officers, much like medical doctors," said Heavilin. "Presently, chiropractors enter as enlisted persons. As

doctors, I told the congressmen we need to stem this type of discrimination and asked him if he was willing to help us."

Rep. Dannemeyer responded to this challenge by saying he would have no problem sponsoring that type of legislation, telling Dr. Heavilin: "I know the chiropractors graduating today are well-educated and should be recognized."

Lobbying further, Dr. Heavilin asked Dannemeyer about other pending legislation which pertains to the Medicare reimbursement of examination and x-ray fees for chiropractors. Currently, patients go to their medical doctor and get coverage for those services under Medicare, whereas patients of chiropractic cannot.

"I have always believed that it is up to the consumer to choose what type of doctor to visit," Dannemeyer told Dr. Heavilin. "In this case, the consumer cannot make a free choice of doctors due to the financial limitations set up by Medicare. I didn't even realize this was the situation. Chiropractic patients deserve to get reimbursed by Medicare so they can be evaluated and have the proper tests ordered to arrive at a diagnosis."

Looking further into Rep. Dannemeyer's background, Dr. Heavilin asked the ACA's Mike Hogan to provide some insight into Rep. Dannemeyer's spending policies regarding chiropractic-related issues. Hogan said the congressman has not supported funding for either chiropractic research or student aid.

Researching further, Dr. Heavilin found this non-spending policy to be largely ideological, since Dannemeyer is a fiscally conservative Republican with strong concerns over controlling the spiraling U.S. deficit.

As the United States faces its second year of recession, the chances are slim that Rep. William Dannemeyer will reserve his frugal spending stance, whether it be for aiding the chiropractic profession or any number of other issues. But today, one American congressman is more aware of the political challenges facing chiropractors across the country, thanks to the lobbying efforts of Dr. J. J. Heavilin. Come voting time at the House of Representatives, Rep. Dannemeyer will hopefully have Heavilin's concerns in mind.

One thing is nearly certain: He won't be thinking about what team is going to win the World Series.

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