

Congress, the Military, and the Doctor of Chiropractic

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Since the members of the 102nd Congress took their collective oath of office, there has been only one major item on their agenda: The attention of Congress has been fully absorbed by the drama now unfolding in the Middle East, and rightfully so. This is a grave and dangerous time for our nation.

It is unreasonable to expect chiropractic's legislative agenda to receive much attention in this hour of national crisis. Although our long-time champion in the United States Senate, Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina has introduced legislation to authorize the commissioning of DCs in the military (S.68), we at the International Chiropractors Association (ICA) believe it will be some time before this legislation receives serious congressional attention. For the chiropractic profession, this is a time both to reflect and to prepare for the time soon to come when it will be our turn to call upon the Congress for attention and action on our issues.

In this time of massive military deployment, I personally feel it is highly appropriate to reflect and carefully consider what role the doctor of chiropractic can and should be playing in this, and in future military situations. For decades, the chiropractic profession has sought inclusion in the health care systems of the various uniformed services, and for that same period, chiropractic has been systematically excluded from national service in this capacity. Commissions for DCs as health care officers has been on the agreed legislative agenda of the International Chiropractors Association and the American Chiropractic Association (ACA) for many years. Predictably, the forces of traditional medicine have fought bitterly to keep the military their exclusive preserve.

I'm deeply disturbed by our inability to serve at this time of crisis, and feel that in this new session of Congress chiropractic must, as a united profession, do all that can possibly be done to secure for the doctor of chiropractic the right to serve as a health care officer in the United States Armed Forces.

We all know the important benefits chiropractic care can offer the soldier in the field, behind the lines and in the hospital. They need and deserve our care as much as we deserve the right to serve our country through its delivery. Through our professional organization we must sharpen our arguments and fully mobilize our political potential to get the message across to our federal legislators.

In the current crisis, many people are certain to ask what role the doctor of chiropractic can play in combat and other extraordinary military situations. We, the chiropractic profession, must craft and deliver compelling answers to these legitimate questions. We must educate lawmakers and military leaders alike in the value of chiropractic in maintaining the peak efficiency and performance potential of combat personnel. Reduction of nerve interference in its many forms through chiropractic adjustments and the elimination of the effects of severe and continued stress on the human body are unique and important contributions that can certainly be made by the doctor of chiropractic. Indeed, throughout the combat system, enhanced wellness means enhanced

performance.

Even in war, the armed forces are no different than any other executive, clerical or industrial work force. The millions of Americans in uniform, in the course of doing their everyday jobs, suffer the same stress, injuries, illnesses, and discomforts as the rest of the national work force. Here, chiropractic has a clear and unique contribution to make to the establishment and maintenance of wellness among this population.

We must be prepared to deal with the contention that chiropractic has a limited combat role by documenting the position of such medical specialists as dentists and podiatrists, and the role they serve in the military. Of equal importance, we must convince our legislators that the doctor of chiropractic can work effectively and productively with other health care providers, including MDs, in a fully integrated health care team.

In the latter days of the 101st Congress, military commission bills were introduced in both houses of Congress as part of the joint ICA/ACA legislative agenda for chiropractic. We were unsuccessful in our efforts to secure their passage; we now focus our hopes on the 102nd Congress. A similar bill has already been reintroduced in the Senate and one will shortly be reintroduced in the House of Representatives.

I believe it is an urgent priority to mobilize the political power of the entire chiropractic community behind legislation to commission doctors of chiropractic as health care officers in the armed forces. Perhaps this should be our first legislative priority this year.

We at the ICA pledge our best efforts to pass legislation that will be introduced shortly in the House of Representatives by Representative Lane Evans of Illinois, and S.68, the Senate bill introduced on January 14, 1991 by Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. We urge you to join with all other dedicated doctors of chiropractic and chiropractic supporters to make this the Congress in which the DC wins the right to wear our nation's uniform.

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