

## 2008: An Election Year With Great Significance

Editorial Staff

*Editor's note:* This is the second in a series of articles on the 2008 election season.

In just a few weeks in January, the political landscape radically changed.

The presumed frontrunners only a year ago, Sen. Hilary Clinton and Sen. John McCain, were one day declared dead as candidates and then after the New Hampshire primary were declared very much alive. In politics, a week is a lifetime. Something significant is happening this election year and this profession better be ready for it.

In a well-written, front-page political analysis in the Jan. 2 issue of the *Wall Street Journal*: "An Epochal Battle. Iowa Kicks Off the Most Wide Open Race Since '80," the author argues that this year's election will influence the country for years to come, similar in impact to the elections of 1894, 1932 and 1980. In each of those elections, there was realignment of political parties and a reshuffling within the parties of the powers of influence. Elections that turn the country in a new direction are rare, coming only once in a generation or so, and yet this year could be such an election.

The sentiment in the country appears to be for change. The war in Iraq is going into its fifth year. The economy appears to be weakening, as there is concern about the housing bust. The president's approval ratings are at an all-time low, but so are Congress' ratings, even though it is dominated by the other party. Record numbers of voters have listed themselves as Independent. When was the last time a Libertarian candidate raised any kind of significant money? Last quarter, candidate Ron Paul raised \$19 million through the Internet.

Having the incumbency label doesn't have the same invincibility it normally has in an election year, which should make members of Congress in both parties a bit nervous. Add to this factor the number of representatives and senators who have decided to retire. In the House of Representatives, 16 Republican members have said they will retire rather than seek re-election and five Republican members of the Senate also plan to retire. Democrats have only one House retiree and none in the Senate.

Whoever wins these races will feel the pressure of the voters, who have become impatient and will now demand action on a series of issues including health reform. It will either be Congress or the states that decide. We'd better pay attention.

Start organizing now. Encourage your state and national associations to make involvement in the political races a priority. Here are some do's and don'ts to consider:

1. Expect accountability from a candidate. If possible, interview them in person. Ask them to respond to a written questionnaire on issues important to you locally and nationally. (Look for some potential questions in subsequent articles.)
2. Don't endorse any earlier than you have to. In politics, a week is a lifetime. The voters are fickle and events beyond anyone's control can change the political landscape in a race.
3. Don't use the majority of your resources for a doomed candidate. You should continue to

support those who have supported the profession, but don't use all your resources on a candidate who is expected to lose.

4. Don't be afraid of the consequences of your candidate losing. If you pick a targeted race and participate actively, the winner is going to find a way to get you in their fold. Remember a truism in politics: The first thing a winning candidate thinks about after being elected is getting re-elected.
5. Start to activate your members for the grassroots side of the campaign. Having a carload of volunteers at a campaign headquarters, particularly at the height of the campaign, has a great impact on the candidate. Understand the value of a doctor's office in the evening, utilizing their phones in contacting potential voters. In many cases, the candidate will provide the volunteers if the doctor allows the use of the office phones after hours.
6. Communicate your support of a candidate to your patients. Once you make an endorsement of a candidate, send out a letter to your patients indicating your support. Include a quote from the candidate that is specific to chiropractic. Most politicians understand the trust doctors have with their patients and will consider this form of support very significant.
7. Use a political action committee to make late contributions. Set up a state political action committee (PAC) and, if possible, a federal political action fund if you are in a state where there is a significant federal race. If possible, accumulate your funds and make the contribution late in the campaign when funds are particularly needed.

In 2000, then-Senate majority leader Tom Daschle went to the then-Chairman of the Senate Veterans Committee urging him to consider legislation just passed by the House that would include chiropractic in the Veterans Administration. This plea was made at a time when the legislation was in doubt. The bill subsequently passed the Senate and was signed into law.

A few years later, Sen. Charles Grassley defied his Senate majority leader, Bill Frist, MD, and passed a chiropractic Medicare pilot program through the Senate committee. That legislation eventually became law. Both legislators were in support of chiropractic, but Grassley's extra effort was made based upon the support he had traditionally received from the chiropractic profession during his legislative career.

When Congress looks at major reform in Medicare or considers some type of universal health care this year, the profession wants to be sure there are members of Congress in both the House and Senate fighting for our inclusion and expansion. The more we help in their efforts to be re-elected, the more we can count on them when it matters. Flex your chiropractic muscles and get involved this campaign year.

FEBRUARY 2008