

Save Our Profession for Less Than \$200

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A paradigm shift is needed in this great profession of ours. We are fortunate that we chose this profession as our life's work, as there is no greater way to positively impact the public's health care needs. We have never wished to be anything other than doctors of chiropractic and we both could have chosen different careers. If we could change one thing, however, it would be the lack of training and advice we received on how our income should be spent.

First of all, we need to pay ourselves. There is no doubt about it - we put in six to eight years in college and amass a great deal of debt; our good work should be compensated accordingly. Second, we need to pay our malpractice insurance. This will ensure the safety of the patients who have been entrusted to our care. Third, we need to pay our "practice insurance." That is to say, we need to protect our profession so it can remain strong and active, and ensure we will be permitted to practice for as many years as we choose.

What is this "practice insurance" we speak of? The dollars we send to our state and national associations in the form of membership dues, as well as contributions to their respective political action committees (PACs). Nowhere else can \$50 a month (the average cost of national or state dues) buy so much. The return on investment is dramatic at the national level. As ACA state delegates representing Washington state and East Texas - both proud, lifelong members - our \$50 per month helps employ more than 35 people, all of whom address challenges that threaten our right to practice on a daily basis.

However, it is not enough to merely be members of our state and national organizations. It is also incumbent upon us to regularly contribute to our professional PACs. A well-funded PAC is an essential component of an association's ability to protect itself legislatively. Take a look at the disparity between the chiropractic and other health professions with respect to PAC funding:

- FACT: In the 2005-2006 election cycle, the AMA PAC contributed \$3.8 million in campaign dollars to federal political candidates.
- FACT: In the 2005-2006 election cycle, the APTA (American Physical Therapy Association) PAC contributed \$1.3 million in campaign dollars to federal political candidates.
- FACT: In the 2005-2006 election cycle, the chiropractic profession only contributed \$300,000 in campaign dollars to federal political candidates. (ACA PAC: \$294,000; ICA PAC: \$10,000.)

Source: Federal Election Commission

Is it any wonder we are struggling as a profession? The frustrating truth is that if every current member of the ACA (15,000 members) and the ICA (3,400 members) contributed only \$20 a month each, our national PAC donations would bring in \$4.4 million annually or \$8.8 million per a two-year election cycle. What a clear difference in legislative outcomes that would bring. But the fact is that the membership rosters of these two organizations currently represent only approximately 30 percent of the profession. If the national membership also grew, these dollar figures would significantly increase.

If 10 percent of all the practicing chiropractors (total in active practice is about 59,000) gave only \$20 a month, our national PAC donation would be \$1.4 million per year, or \$2.8 million per a two-year election cycle. Better yet, if 20 percent of all practicing chiropractors gave just \$20 a month, our national PAC would have \$2.8 million annually, or \$5.6 million per two-year election cycle. This amount of money would make us more powerful in Washington than the AMA, and would ensure the protection of our profession and the patients we serve.

To put it bluntly, none of our past successes in Washington would have been achieved without contributions from chiropractic PACs. Most importantly, going forward into tumultuous and uncertain political and economic times, a vibrant and robust PAC will be even more vital to our efforts to be "at the table" during national health care and Medicare reform discussion. Simply put, our ultimate legislative victories rely on the strength of our PACs.

Key point: In order to be eligible to contribute to any national PAC, you must first be a member of its parent association. So, guess what? We must increase our national membership! Here is our monthly proposal. Let's go back to where this article began, discussing how your monthly budget might be prioritized (see table).

The breadth of this article does not allow us to expand on the importance of giving to NCLAF, the FCP and your alma mater, but there will be more on that later. Please notice something. The key here is joining your state organization *and* a national organization. We are promoting national chiropractic membership. We have chosen the ACA for its stellar work and significant contribution to our profession, but the point is that it is imperative you choose one organization and join. Based on the collaborative success our profession has experienced in the past year at the Chiropractic Summit meetings (which included the ACA, ICA, COCSA, ACC and 25 other chiropractic entities), there is an implied agreement that the dollars each organization collects will go toward key shared issues such as Medicare and national health care reform.

1. Pay yourself	
2. Pay malpractice insurance premiums	
3. Pay dues and PAC contributions:	
ACA or ICA dues:	\$50
State dues:	\$50
ACA or ICA PAC:	\$20
State PAC:	\$20
NCLAF:	\$10
FCP:	\$10
Alumni contribution:	\$10
Total:	\$170 per month

NCLAF: The National Chiropractic Legislative Action Fund is a non-affiliated organization providing contributions from doctors, patients and other chiropractic supporters to defend chiropractic against discrimination. The NCLAF is not affiliated with the ACA PAC in any fashion.

FCP: The Foundation for Chiropractic Progress is a non-affiliated organization providing dollars to expand public understanding of chiropractic through effective media.

We must do this. Our leadership, and most importantly, our patients, need us. The ACA and ICA are dues-driven organizations. They die without us, and we die without them. Make the commitment and be proud so at the end of your career, you will have no regrets. Instead, you will have an amazing degree of pride for the health of the public you treat and this great profession. If you are not yet a member, contact acatoday.org or www.chiropractic.org and sign up online. If you are already a member but do not yet contribute to your national PAC, commit now to at least \$20 a month. It is that easy.

If you are following your heart and giving \$50 or \$100 or more a month to the PACs, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Don't stop! When our profession gets up to speed and begins to contribute as they should, you can reduce your monthly commitment and enjoy the shared responsibility.

We understand not all chiropractors will immediately embrace this concept, so here is our first and most immediate goal: 10 percent of our entire profession giving \$30 a month, equaling \$2.1 million of PAC contributions annually. If you are currently giving more than that, well done! Keep up the good work.

For more information or to donate to any of the organizations mentioned in this article:

ACA: www.amerchiro.org; (703) 276-8000

ICA: www.chiropractic.org; (703) 538-5000

NCLAF: www.acatoday.org; (703) 276-8800

FCP: www.foundation4cp.com; (866) 901-F4CP

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