

## The Chiropractic Primaries: We Need to Do Some Soul Searching

Louis Sportelli, DC

Well, the primaries are over! How did we fare? One could be the eternal optimist and say we had an incredible victory with Dr. Peter Ferguson of Ohio winning the primary and now bracing for the November election. For the first time in history, a doctor of chiropractic has a chance to become a member of the United States House of Representatives. We wish him well, but more on that later.

Dr. Meredith Bakke of De Forest, Wisconsin and Dr. Paul Phillips of Vancouver, Washington lost their primary races. Thus the profession lost two chances to have DCs in DC. (Editor' note: see the Oct. 5th issue.)

In speaking to Drs. Bakke and Phillips, it is clear that they fully expected to win. They entered their respective races at great personal expense and made the commitments of time, energy and talent to become a U.S. Representative. In retrospect, they were "outspent," pure and simple. The fact remains that it costs money to win elections.

The costs have simply escalated to a point that unless you have all the financial backing you need, the efforts to raise the funds become increasingly diminished. Drs. Bakke and Phillips thought they had an ace in the hole. They were doctors of chiropractic. They were members of a profession which virtually lived and died by the political sword. They knew all things being equal, they would and could count on the support of their colleagues around the country because there had never been a chiropractor in Congress. With all the current upheaval in health care, it would be logical that the profession which has suffered considerable economic and professional consequences at the hands of unfriendly managed care organizations would support chiropractors who could make a difference in the very elite fraternity known as the U.S. Congress. Unfortunately for Drs. Bakke and Phillips, the help did not come. The DCs across the country, and many in their own back yard, did not support them with money, motivation or manpower. Many DCs related to them that they did not stand a chance simply because they were chiropractors. Wow, is the second class citizenry mentality still alive and well in 1998?

Many did not like the views of the chiropractic candidates on a few issues, and so they did not support them. Did these same DCs believe that the other candidates would be more willing to resolve chiropractic issues? Dr. Phillips' opponent outspent him 5 to 1, and there was no way he could match the campaign. He lamented, "If every DC had just given \$10, I would have had \$500,000 to run the campaign and it would have made the financial difference." I would imagine Dr. Bakke would echo the sentiment.

Where do we go from here? Well, we know that two doctors of chiropractic have tried and lost. They may have lost the race, but they did not lose for the profession. When a doctor of chiropractic runs for public office and wins, or when a DC does anything that demonstrates an ability beyond the

profession, the public image of chiropractic is enhanced. Win, lose, or draw, every DC should take a minute and send a note to these candidates and let them know you are proud of their accomplishments and their commitment to make the sacrifice necessary to run for public office. Every once in a while it is nice to hear from your colleagues that your efforts were appreciated.

What about Dr. Peter Ferguson? We already know that he has won a major victory simply by winning the primary. He now needs to win the general election, and he can do it if you help. You need to do it now. The November election is around the corner.

**It Will Take Money to Win!**

Every doctor of chiropractic who reads this column should immediately sit down, write a check to Ferguson for Congress and mail it to P.O. Box 224, Middlebranch, OH 44652-0224. Think of the media blitz that Dr. Ferguson could mount with \$500,000!

More importantly, it is critical that the chiropractic profession have a doctor of chiropractic in Congress. It is critical for the profession to have a voice in the health care debate: to have the opportunity to bring the realities of every day practitioners and patients to the halls of the House of Representatives with real life experiences. That is what Congressman Peter Ferguson can do; that is what chiropractic has needed and has been lacking for so long.

The bottom line for the chiropractic profession is we must stop complaining about many of the issues which confront us and get behind positive activities which can and will change our course in history. The election of Peter Ferguson is one of those issues which will have ramifications beyond our imagination. It will bring to congress the voice of a profession that has witnessed the results of discrimination first hand. It will bring to Congress a voice that understands fairness, equality, and opportunity. It will bring to Congress a voice that the consumers of health care in America truly need -- a voice that understands issues surrounding choice, access and equality.

If the chiropractic profession does not seize upon the opportunity to do all within its collective power to elect Peter Ferguson, shame on us. We need to put aside differences, politics, personalities, and carpe diem.

**Remember, it can't be done after November!**

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OCTOBER 1998