

We Get Letters & E-Mail

"Labor was the catalyst"

Dear Editor:

My first thought after reading Don Marx's article "A Chiropractic Union in Louisiana for 26 Years, and No Progress" (see August 11, 1997 issue of DC) was to answer by saying that Don Marx did not come into Louisiana until January 1976. His knowledge is not based on his personal experience, but from repeated stories (some which have been changed with time).

As for my second thought, I do not wish to copy his negative and divisive example, which did not serve to the betterment of our profession. Instead, I wish to think each and every chiropractor who practiced in Louisiana before the 1974 law. I would like to thank them for their sacrifices, hardships, and the embarrassment and harassment they endured. I would like to thank them for their vision, spirit and courage. Thank you, thank you!

I am proud to say I was one of the founders of the Chiropractic Union. Make no mistake, we knew we were out of the norm. We had an unheard voice in Louisiana. What we needed was a voice that could be heard: a voice that spoke the political language of Louisiana. Labor was that voice; it was the catalyst to open the door, and open it did.

I am reminded of a poem printed on the first Chiropractic Union stationery:

*"They called us rebel heretics
A thing to flaunt
They drew a circle and closed us out
But love and we had the wit to win
We drew a circle and pulled them in."*

*Mary B. Mormand, DC
Marrero, Louisiana*

"Political strength of the union cannot be denied"

Dear Editor:

I read with great interest your front page story on DCs and unions. I know Dr. Donald Marx and count him as a friend of mine. We worked together on the Louisiana Board of Chiropractic Examiners. While I believe him to be a tireless supporter of the profession, I also know he is a vehement opponent of the union. This is local intraprofessional politics. You know ... the kind that hurts the profession.

To say the Louisiana union has not helped the profession's progress is ludicrous. That would be as ridiculous as saying the CAL (Chiropractic Association of Louisiana, Dr. Marx's organization) has not helped the profession. Don also intimates it is the union's fault there is no solidarity within the profession. This is a half-truth; there are personality conflicts within the groups. There is also a third group within the state, further weakening the profession.

The political strength of the union cannot be denied. This legislative session, the CAL (by far the largest of the groups) attempted to gain control of the board of examiners' nominating process. The smaller union stopped them. This intraprofessional squabble in the legislature gave the profession a black eye. It will be harder next year for us to promote chiropractic because of it.

Asking Dr. Marx for a balanced evaluation of the union's effectiveness in Louisiana is tantamount to asking the AMA's Committee on Quackery for their opinion on chiropractic. If you want political strength, unionize. Our in-fighting has nothing to do with whether or not one group is affiliated with a union. If all states/associations had a union affiliation, we could jump the profession ahead 10 years.

Dwayne L. Burch, DC
Immediate Past-President,
Louisiana Board of Chiropractic Examiners
Hammond, Louisiana

AFL-CIO Affiliation Gets Results in Louisiana

Dear Editor:

I am happy that you have exposed chiropractors nationwide of the possibility of working with and within the labor movement to help chiropractors attain their rightful place in the health care system. However, I am disappointed that you chose Don Marx, who had no first-hand knowledge of the series of events from 1971-76. In fact, Marx was not even a licensed chiropractor during the time he professes to know so much about our union or licensing statute.

Dr. Marx's "no progress" comment is more about sour grapes during this past legislative session than the truth. Both former state Senator Dr. Gerry Hinton, a Republican, and state Representative Dr. J.E. Stevenson, who handled out licensing statute in the house, have publicly disagreed with Marx's assessment. They are experienced politicians; Dr. Marx is not. They were also instrumental in passing our legislation; Dr. Marx was not.

When I began practicing in Louisiana in 1971, there were approximately 160 chiropractors, no licensing law, no insurance coverage, and you could not even get a loan to start practice, because it was illegal. Even the Louisiana Supreme Court decreed "the practice of chiropractic" was "the practice of medicine," and chiropractors were hauled into court, fined, or jailed for practicing medicine without a license. Since the 1950s, chiropractors tried passing a chiropractic licensing law, only to be beaten handily by the medical society and its many allies.

In 1971 a small group of chiropractors, of which I was not a member, formed an organization and affiliated with MEBA (Marine Engineers Beneficial Association) and the Louisiana AFL-CIO. This totally changed the game! No longer were the 160 chiropractors alone against the AMA, Louisiana

Medical Society, Louisiana Hospital Association, physical therapists and others. We now had allies: craftsmen, engineers, airline pilots, teachers and other working men and women who belonged to the AFL-CIO.

In 1974, the medical society realized we had the power to pass the licensure. They tried to limit the number of DCs by cutting out as many existing practitioners as possible, and stopping as many new chiropractors from entering the state as they could. Dr. Marx was right about one thing. The AFL-CIO would not allow the medical society to decide who would be licensed or not, nor control the future flow of chiropractors into the state.

Dr. Marx referred to a time when the Louisiana Union of Chiropractic Physicians (LUCP) and the CAL (his organization) were joined together. What he doesn't tell you is that I, as president of the CAL, negotiated and consummated the merger. It should have been a powerful tool for chiropractic. The reason it fell apart was because the CAL did not want the LUCP to recommend state board appointments to the governor. It is unfortunate that some people will sacrifice the well being of their profession for their own little prerogatives, but it happens all the time. In fact, during this past legislative session, the CAL tried again to pass legislation so they could monopolize board appointments. The LUCP and independent doctors soundly defeated their effort.

Our affiliation with the AFL-CIO over the years has been very productive for the profession in Louisiana. It pains me when doctors who have enjoyed the fruits of this progress are unwilling to admit or understand how it was made.

Having been president of both organizations and practicing since 1971, I recognize progress; obviously, Dr. Marx cannot. In short, we passed insurance equality two years after licensure, which included Blue Cross. We passed a law forbidding all state agencies from discriminating against chiropractic in their insurance programs. We've upgraded our licensing law on several occasions. We passed a law giving patients in HMOs the right to choose chiropractic services. We included chiropractic in the state Medicaid system. We have continually fought off many attempts by the medical society, insurance industry and business lobby to retard our progress.

When we propose a bill in our state capital, we are always opposed by the medical society, medical specialists and all their allies in the health care industry. We in Louisiana have an equalizer: the 200,000 strong working men and women of the AFL-CIO. I am very proud of that. That's real progress and we have the results to prove it! If we had this equalizer in every state and on a national level, maybe chiropractic could take its rightful place in the health care industry.

Dr. Leroy J. Stagni, DC
Kenner, Louisiana

"What membership benefits does this union offer?"

Dear Editor:

How much "fact checking" does your editorial staff do on submitted articles? John Sweeney, president of the AFL-CIO, and author of Dynamic Chiropractic's August 11, 1997 cover story, "Chiropractors and the AFL-CIO: In Unity There Is Strength!", has taken great liberty with the facts.

Mr. Sweeney states, "Last year 4,500 chiropractors in New York took the first step to fight back (against insurance company limits on coverage for chiropractic services). They formed the National Union of Chiropractic Physicians (affiliated with the AFL-CIO) ...". Dynamic Chiropractic's circulation breakdown on page three of that same issue lists 4,819 doctors of chiropractic in New York state. In reality, only a small portion (less than five percent) of New York state chiropractors are members of the AFL-CIO, not the 93% stated.

Mr. Sweeney goes on to say these New York chiropractors (the vast majority of which are not members of the AFL-CIO) "acted together to stop Governor George Pataki and managed care companies from denying New Yorkers the right to choose chiropractic physicians if they wished to do so." No such action came to fruition last year. In fact, a chiropractic insurance equality bill just recently (during this past August) was passed by both houses in the New York state legislature, and has just (as of this writing) received Governor Pataki's signature to become law. The framework of this landmark bill was drafted by the non-AFL-CIO affiliated New York State Chiropractic Association's legal counsel, Ross Lanzafame. The small number of AFL-CIO member chiropractors in New York state should be applauded though for adding their support to this recent victory.

Also attached you will find an interesting memo dated February 6, 1996 from Victoria Contino, associate director of political action and legislation for district council 37 of the AFL-CIO to New York state Senator Velella (see attached memo after letter). Ms. Contino indicates that DC 37 opposes passage of a chiropractic insurance equity bill.

In closing, I believe AFL-CIO union benefits do not include coverage for chiropractic services, even for chiropractors who are members of the AFL-CIO. So, what membership benefits does this union offer to chiropractors?

*David J. Rogers, DC, DABCO
Albany, New York*

Editor's note: Dynamic Chiropractic was fully aware that Mr. Sweeney's membership claims were highly exaggerated. The editorial department believes that it was important for the chiropractic profession to read exactly what Mr. Sweeney wrote, and consider the exaggerated claim for itself.

(Attached memo from Victoria Contino)

February 6, 1996 Legislative Memo: We oppose DC 37

S.5972/Velella (Senate Calendar #178)

This legislation provides certain policies which provide coverage for hospital, surgical or medical care include coverage for services performed by a licensed chiropractor.

District Council 37 opposes the passage of this bill. This bill would amend New York State's insurance law to require unlimited coverage of chiropractors.

District Council 37 opposes mandated benefit legislation because such legislation interferes with the collective bargaining process. District Council 37 maintains that these benefit packages should be determined at the bargaining table.

Increasingly, when management and labor sit down at the bargaining table, it becomes clear that the

millions of dollars of employer funds needed to pay for mandated coverage are not available to maintain fair salary scales, retraining, insurance for retirees and a host of other programs, services and options which the negotiators might wish to implement. Every time the legislature mandates, there is less room for negotiation.

District Council 37 has traditionally bargained for appropriate and cost-effective employee health benefits, including rational and affordable chiropractic benefits -- and we will continue to do so. The bill under discussion does not assist us in reaching that goal.

On behalf of its 120,000 members, District Council 37 opposes passage of this legislation.

*Victoria Contino, Assistant Director
Political Action and Legislation Department*

To Clarify

Dear Editor:

I write for purposes of clarification. In your August 11, 1997 issue, John J. Sweeney, AFL-CIO president, erroneously stated that last year 4,500 New York chiropractors formed the National Union of Chiropractic Physicians (NUCP), which is an affiliate of the Office and Professional Employees International Union.

While 4,500 NUCP members might be our ultimate goal in New York, this figure actually represents the total number of practicing chiropractors in New York state, not those who are current NUCP members. Furthermore, I would like to add that this year Governor George Pataki was an ally of chiropractic, working closely with NUCP and other New York chiropractic groups to draft legislation providing New Yorkers with equal access to quality chiropractic care.

*Michael Goodwin
President,
Office and Professional Employees International Union
New York, New York*

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