



New Congress, New Opportunities

With the swearing in of the 110th Congress Jan. 4, the Democrats take formal control of the House and Senate. At the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, President Bush and his team retain the reins of the Executive Branch.

What do the new Congress and the final two years of the Bush presidency hold for community pharmacy? Many political commentators are predicting partisan gridlock: newly empowered House Democrats passing their legislative wish list that gets either diluted or stalled in the Senate, where the one seat edge the far from united Democrats hold is nine votes shy of the 60 needed to halt a filibuster or override a veto. Before the year is out, all legislation will be viewed through the prism of the 2008 presidential primaries of both parties and the ensuing campaign. Not much time for legislation, much less statesmanship.

Still, the changes in Congress were good and helped move us toward our goal of a community pharmacy majority. NCPA prides itself on being a bipartisan organization. We have carefully cultivated friends on both sides of the aisle. Quite frankly, however, the old leadership of the House and Senate had long been a stumbling block on community pharmacy issues.

Succeeding in politics starts with campaigns. Pharmacists got involved this campaign season at an unprecedented level. That bodes well for the future. Now we must build on this momentum and step up our political involvement even more.

Some special thanks go out to Joe Lech of our executive committee and Carmen DiCello of Value Drugs, who helped spearhead efforts across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to defeat a major stumbling block, Sen. Rick Santorum, the third ranking Republican. Newly elected Sen. Bob Casey has indicated he is looking forward to working with us to achieve meaningful health care reform.

On top of that we have a new friend in Congress—Democrat Chris Carney, who Lech not only worked for throughout the campaign, but also starred in his television

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spot, which political analysts credit for propelling him to victory. Independent pharmacists also provided get-out-the-vote help to secure a win in one of the most hotly contested races in the country on behalf of Republican Rep. Jim Gerlach of Pennsylvania, a staunch community pharmacy supporter.

Some special thanks also go to NCPA's Jerry Shapiro, for providing timely political donations to candidates around the country; President-Elect Steve Giroux, Past President Sharlea Leatherwood, and Ron Fitzwater of the Missouri Pharmacists Association for helping host campaign fundraisers; Richard Beck with American Pharmacies for driving all over Texas to help our congressional friends; and Anthony DeFazio for helping lead the charge against Medicare Part D architect and pharmacy foe Rep. Nancy Johnson (R-Conn.).

Now we have the hard work in front of us. We must pass PBM business negotiations. We must pass prompt pay. We must fix the Medicaid reimbursement system. But because of the efforts of NCPA and independent pharmacists everywhere, we are better positioned to win on the issues that impact our collective bottom lines and professional future. **ap**