



Congressional Coalition Building

By Michael F. Conlan

Bipartisanship is in predictably short supply this election year with control of the White House and Congress at stake. The second session of the 110th Congress did get off to a fairly harmonious start with quick enactment of a \$150 billion economic stimulus package that included a couple of important tax breaks for small business pharmacy owners.

But many observers expect this to be a short, partisan, acrimonious session with few clear legislative victories for either party. So it was heartening to have the broadly bipartisan Congressional Community Pharmacy Coalition that NCPA worked to establish hold a briefing on NCPA's legislative issues early in the year. This caucus was formed by lawmakers from both parties to have a forum to speak on issues of importance to them about community pharmacy.

The briefing was arranged by staffers from the offices of two of the coalition's chairs, Reps. Marion Berry (D-Ark.) and Jerry Moran (R-Kan.). The other chairs are Reps. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-Wash.) and Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.).

Charlie Sewell, NCPA's senior vice president for government affairs, provided background information on our legislative agenda. Then, two committee aides from House Ways & Means and Senate Finance, respectively, gave the assembled staffers from more than 40 congressional offices updates on where prospects for Medicare Part D prompt pay and Medicaid AMP fix/delay legislation stood at that time.

They said that the situation remains highly fluid. There is a realization that community pharmacies and their patients, especially in rural areas, could be grievously harmed if something is not done. If our bills move, they likely will be folded into larger Medicare/Medicaid packages.

Money remains a stumbling block. The Congressional Budget Office—the arbiter in such matters—continues to project the cost to the government of our legislation much

higher than we believe is justified. We and our allies are scouring the federal budget to find savings or offsets that we can use to balance against the cost of our legislation.

One congressional aide whose boss isn't on one of the House committees of jurisdiction on our major issues (Ways & Means, Energy & Commerce, Judiciary) asked how to best advance the community pharmacy agenda. It was suggested that the representative hand deliver a letter to the relevant chairman seeking action on our bills.

That's a good suggestion to pass along to all members of Congress. Another is to thank your representative if he or she is a member of the Coalition and if not, ask them to join.

Other members of the Coalition are Reps. Robert Aderholt (R-Ala.), Michael Arcuri (D-N.Y.), Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), John Boozman (R-Ark.), Nancy Boyda (D-Kan.), Christopher Carney (D-Pa.), Geoff Davis (R-Ky.), Lincoln Davis (D-Tenn.), Lloyd Doggett (D-Tex.), Thelma Drake (R-Va.), Jo Ann Emerson (R-Mo.), Virginia Foxx (R-N.C.), Virgil Goode (R-Va.), Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.), Stephanie Herseth Sandlin (D-S.D.), Maurice Hinchey (D-N.Y.), Peter Hoekstra (R-Mich.), Walter Jones (R-N.C.), Nick Lampson (D-Tex.), Frank LoBiondo (R-N.J.), Carolyn McCarthy (D-N.Y.), Mike McIntyre (D-N.C.), Charlie Melancon (D-La.), Solomon Ortiz (D-Tex.), Ciro Rodriguez (D-Tex.), Mike Ross (D-Ark.), Peter Sessions (R-Tex.), Zack Space (D-Ohio), Todd Tiahrt (R-Kan.), Greg Walden (R-Ore.), and Charles Wilson (D-Ohio). **ap**

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