

IAGD Advocacy Report

The Academy of General Dentistry has an annual Hill Day Event in Washington DC. This year the event was April 13 and 14. Academy legislative members from selected states come to Washington to meet with their respective legislators to discuss dental issues of special interest. As the legislative chairman for Iowa I attended and met with our legislators and their staff.

Most importantly this is an opportunity for me to present dental issues and their effect on Iowa patients and dentists. Of lessor importance and personally relevant, it is a civics lesson for me that provides insight into the political process. It is very easy to think only of our dental issues and the seemingly obvious solutions to them. However, attending the AGD preparation seminars and meeting with the legislators quickly educated me about the political process, other issues affecting the political process, and other parties with their own viewpoints and issues. The political process and the interests of other parties deserve consideration. There is a bigger picture and my own concerns are a small part of the picture. Compromise and understanding are necessary to achieve a result.

I met with Senator Harkin's two staff members and with Senator Ernst's staff person. I was fortunate to have a personal meeting with Representative David Young and his staff person. Meeting with staff is valuable because they gather the information and prepare reports for their legislator. The following issues were discussed.

The Action for Dental Health Act which would allow the Centers For Disease Control to allocate funds for dental projects such as expanding access to care for elderly patients with on-site dental treatment, water fluoridation, charitable dental events such as MOM treatment, and strengthening relationships with other health care professionals.

Dental student debt increased dramatically in the past 10 years to an average of \$220,000. The dental students who attended the event anticipated a debt of \$300-\$400,000. The debt load significantly affects career choices of graduate dentists. We asked legislators to reduce the federal student loan rate from the current 6.21%. We asked for the in-school government interest subsidy under the Stafford loans to be given to students in graduate programs. We asked for increased funding for loan forgiveness programs such as the National Health Service Corps and other public service loan forgiveness programs. Also, we asked for the opportunity to refinance loans when interest rates fall.

Medical device tax of 2.3 percent is burdensome for dental equipment makers. It will be passed to the dental buyers and ultimately passed to the patient consumer. Repeal of the tax has broad support.

The McCarran-Ferguson Act exempts insurance companies from antitrust laws thus giving them an unfair advantage over the dental profession and the patient population. It was necessary 40 years ago to protect the health insurance industry during its formative years. Now, insurance companies are large, well-capitalized, and stable. They share information about fee structures, patient populations, and costs. The medical and dental profession is prohibited from doing this. The insurance antitrust protection is no longer needed. Repeal of the act is needed.

The legislators were interested and understanding about dental issues and their effect on the public. Whenever these issues arise in public conversation the academy dental members should ask their legislators for their support. The legislators understand that they serve as public representatives.