

NOW THE WORK BEGINS

The elections are thankfully over and now our real work begins. While some of our candidates have won and others have lost, our mission remains unchanged. I strongly believe the goal line is in sight and reachable, but it will require extra effort from our members on all sides of the entire political spectrum. While the Republicans have maintained control of the Congress and the Presidency, I believe the key to our success is now with the Democratic Party. The Democratic leadership has consistently been on the wrong side of this important issue, but perhaps now can be convinced to change for two primary reasons.

The first reason is that the Democratic Party has traditionally been the party of the people, championing social causes. While the Republicans have watched costs, the Democrats have always cared about patient access. Remember that it was President Nixon who started HMO's. A major social issue has always been health care access and affordability, both of which liability clearly affects. The estimated costs of \$60+ billion, when adding defensive medicine and actual insurance expenses, caused by the liability crisis could by itself pay for the medically uninsured. The public clearly understands this and the last election reflects it. Because it was a major campaign issue it will be an early focus in Congress next year. The Democratic Party should not be seen obstructing the solution or it will hurt them even more in the next election cycle as the problem worsens.

Secondly, though it may go against the conventional wisdom, medical liability reform is in the interest of the Democratic Party's most powerful lobby, the plaintiffs bar, as well. I say this because the final result desired for the strengthened Republicans is actually tort reform across the board. While the public understands how medical liability restricts their access to care and wants it fixed, they are not as averse to lawsuits against Ford or GM for exploding gas tanks. I can see the Republicans riding the demand for medical liability reform to accomplish total tort reform, which would be devastating to trial lawyers across the country. Lawsuits against physicians, in reality, are miniscule compared to suits against mega corporations such as Enron, Philip Morris, or McDonalds. It seems to me that it would be in their interest to get us out of the way, and I urge those of us with influence among the Democratic Party to discuss it with them, and hopefully they will agree.

The greatest result from our struggles this year has been the growth of physician activism and unity. The incredible response from the medical community shown at the rally and expressed to the medical organizations is heartening. You should know that Arizona played a big roll in the Senate election in South Dakota as personal effort and financial support helped put John Thune over the top against Tom Daschle, the leader of the filibuster against Senate Bill 607. This activism should be continued after liability reform is accomplished as many other issues will affect our practices and patients in the future. Hopefully, more doctors will join the medical organizations, which have now demonstrated their effectiveness.

We now end this year and turn over the reins to Dr. Marc Rosen and the new MCMS Board. I have enjoyed very much working with the Board and the tremendous staff at the Medical Society. They are not only supportive, but consistently took the lead in making things happen. They are effective, enthusiastic and a pleasure to work with. Also a special thanks to the

members of the Ex-President's group. They were invaluable to me and hopefully this group will be continued. These are people who have knowledge of the past and know how to get things done. They are the doers and I look forward to joining their ranks. Good luck to us all!

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President