

LEGISLATIVE Update

by Allison R. Webel

“Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it.”

—Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience*

Citizenship in this country is a wonderful privilege. We enjoy freedoms many across the globe can only dream about, but with them comes responsibilities. America is a representative democracy and is predicated upon the informed, active, passionate voice of the American people. But with low voter turnout, disinterest in legislative representation and a lack of knowledge regarding governmental decisions, it appears that many young Americans just do not care about the state of our country.

As future nurses, we owe it ourselves and to our patients to become informed, active citizens. As an increasing number of health care issues are being addressed and regulated by the state and federal governments, we must make our voices heard and be vigilant guardians of the American public’s health as nursing’s founders intended.

So with packed schedules and heavy demands on our time and resources, how do we as nursing students do our part legislatively? The following tips will help you become more involved in the legislative process.

1. Read! On the bus ride to clinicals, or during your lunch break or while waiting on line, read your local newspaper’s coverage of governmental issues, as well as the news magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Economist*, and *Capital Update* published by the American Nurses Association. There are also many

nursing publications that feature legislative news, such as *The American Journal of Nursing*, *The American Nurse*, and *Nursing Spectrum*. Arrange to subscribe to these publications, or view them online. The more you read, the more informed you will be! (See resources).

2. Become involved in your school government through participation in student council or a university committee. Many colleges offer seminars or town hall meetings on issues that affect the community, and these offer a great education on how to be proactive.

3. Communicate with local officials and organizations. There are many “hot” topics in nursing today that directly affect the health care delivery system such as: universal health coverage, patient safety legislation, health disparities, access to health care in rural areas, and the Nurse Reinvestment Act. These are concerns for everyone involved in health care delivery, and we should all understand them.

Educate yourself on the issues and communicate with local representatives via formal letter, phone or e-mail. Remember, these are your elected representatives and they work for you, so it is their job to listen. You can also research online organizations that deal with specific issues, such as “Cover The Uninsured.” Find out how you can work on the grassroots level to help get the message out.

(continued on pg. 37)



“Legislative Update” informs members of important legislative issues in nursing and health care and encourages political activism. To share your ideas for this column or to contact the author, email nsvicerepresident@yahoo.com.

Nurse in Washington Internship Scholarships Announced! See story on p. 40.



(continued from pg. 35)

4. Research internships with either lawmakers or nongovernmental organizations if you are interested in policymaking. Through internships, we gain a “birds-eye” view of the evolution of policies and laws, which help to develop the analytical and political skills needed to help effect change.

5. Don’t underestimate the importance of voting! Voting was designed to ensure that all citizens express their voice, so we must pay attention to election issues, cast an informed vote, and spread the word to fellow students about the “Get Out The Vote” campaign every autumn.

It takes time and energy to fulfill our civic responsibilities, but it is worth it! You cannot put a price on ensuring an honest, fair, free and sustainable democracy, for now and for future generations. Remember,

there are many who have sacrificed their lives to guarantee us these privileges. We must be responsible and do our part to guarantee these same

privileges for every U.S. citizen. ■

Allison Webel is the NSNA 2003-2004 vice president and chair, Legislation/ Education Committee.

resources

Legislative Web sites

Cover the Uninsured:
covertheuninsuredweek.org/

NIWI:
alliance@reesgroupinc.com

ANA Governmental Affairs:
www.nursingworld.org

Roll Call:
www.rollcall.com

Health Leaders:
www.healthleaders.com

Congressional Quarterly:
www.cq.com

AACN Governmental Affairs:
www.aacn.nche.edu/government

Publications

The American Nurse:
<http://www.nursingworld.org/tan/>

The American Journal of Nursing:
www.ajnonline.com

News Resources

Time Magazine:
www.time.com

Newsweek:
www.newsweek.com

The Economist:
www.theeconomist.com

CNN:
www.cnn.com

BBC:
www.bbc.com