

AMCHP 2008 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE:

What Washington Wants to Hear: Explaining Your Programs to Congress

March 1st to 5th, 2008

JOSHUA BROWN: All right. Folks, we're going to get started here so that we can let people kind of wrap up here and go have dinner and all that kind of good stuff tonight. How many people were actually just in the last session in this same room? A good number of you. I'll try not to repeat myself here.

This is a very exciting session for me personally because of our two speakers. These are actually the important people here in Washington, D.C., unlike myself. These are people kind of that I turn to when I have questions about appropriations and kind of people I turn to when I need help with certain issues working on maternal and child help block grant. I'll introduce them right now first, and then I'm going to go over just a couple slides to kind of set up why we're talking about this and then turn it over to them.

Julio Abreu is actually the Senior Director for Government Affairs of the Mental Health America. Julio joined Mental Health America in April of 2001 as a member of their government affairs team, the similar things that we do here.

He's advocated for public health and civil right issues for the last 15 years. Julio, you're showing your age. In his current position as Senior Director of Government Affairs at Mental Health America he's worked closely obviously with the senate, with the house of representatives and the current and past administrations.

In addition, he has teamed with the congressional black and Hispanic caucuses on a variety of issues and initiatives that both of those organizations have worked on.

Aside from Julio's extensive work and knowledge of the legislative process he has experience working with several of our federal agencies, including work on regulations, conferences and grant activity.

Julio recognized the need to work in coalitions like we talked about before and utilize organizational boards and networks to advance any legislative agenda. Julio also sit on the board of the Consortium of Citizens with Disabilities. More importantly he's the current president of the Coalition For Health Funding and is a co-chair of the Mental Health Liaison Group.

Prior to coming to the mental health association Julio worked for the AIDS action human rights campaign. He also worked in the legislative operations office of the

United States House of Representatives. So Julio certainly brings a unique perspective to these talks.

I think many of you all may know Chris Goldson, too. Chris Goldson worked a long time for AMCHP and actually Chris worked on the appropriation for AMCHP. So when Christopher unfortunately left us, he left all that work to me, so thank you, Chris.

Chris, however, had higher aspirations which we always knew he did. Chris now works as a legislative assistant for the office of Congresswoman Gwen Moore who is from Wisconsin. Chris is currently a legislative assistant who handles a portfolio of issues involving transportation, environment and natural resources. He works on Homeland Security issues.

Now, while Chris certainly isn't the person within his office to work on health issues, I thought it was important to bring him over here because he does have a unique perspective of the maternal and child block grant and my hope is he's going to give us kind of those tips and trips of how we can kind of make our case to congressional office no matter what the issue is, and so we're very pleased to have him.

Well, I'll be brief in this because I think as we said earlier, a lot of you all were in the prior session so this somewhat repeats a lot of that information.

Here's our people again. You know, I have this up by my desk, and I thought it was quite appropriate because frankly as we talked about over the last five years the maternal and child health block grant has either been flat funded or cut and frankly as far as I'm concerned the nation's children are really being left unattended more and more every year. And I should have included women in that, too. As I said it's been cut or flat funded the last five years but as Brent pointed out this year we are going to go for full funding of the maternal and child health block grand, and again that's 850 million dollars. That's what we're authorized at.

Current realities, we talked about this a little bit before, the deficit's getting larger. Unfortunately there's a war that continues with regards to who comes in, whether the war ends immediately, I think there's still going to be a lot of time and money put into perhaps getting equipment and people back. A lot of people tell me well, if we get a new president and we end the war tomorrow suddenly will there be a huge pot of money left over? I think that's probably not the case unfortunately. I think this is going to have repercussions for years to many come.

And presidential election now, we can be hopeful for a new administration that may be a little bit more receptive to maternal and child health issues, but the presidential election comes into play because I think there's going to be a lot of

time and energy spent on the election and perhaps take away some focus on some other important issues until there's actually a decision made at the end.

As we like to point out, you know, I think Brent said this last time just a few moments ago, a lot of programs have suffered the last few years but this has been a few programs that have done better than others, put it that way. I think we mentioned the community health centers that have done almost double their budgets over the last few years, the WIC program as Brent pointed out I think got almost 400 million dollars last year, the WIC program we should point I think was immune to the across the board cut that a lot of programs suffered last year. So these programs have kind of done okay even in this economic downturn for the country.

Why are the reasons for that? Well, I think there's a lot of reasons for that. I think we know where the community health centers have done fairly well, and that was a program that the administration really took to the nation and really wanted to fund. However, you know, these programs really have been able to show a measurable difference in what they do and we hope a lot of our programs are going to be able to do that as we move ahead for full funding for the block grant.

Some of these programs have had a strong advocacy push from their members that are able to get up on the hill and kind of carry their message up. And again we touched on this last time, the infrastructure versus services argument.

These two don't know, but in the last session that we had, I mentioned the fact that Secretary Leavitt had spoke at several -- spoke at the house subcommittee and the budget committee and several times when asked about why several programs were cut or flat funded he said I instructed my staff to put together a budget that would fund programs that provide services not infrastructure.

As we said before, you know, regardless of whether Secretary Leavitt's going to be there next year or not, I think congress is thinking about that now, so it's important to kind of address that.

So why is it still important, even if all these other things are kind of happening and perhaps you think well there's not going to be much money for us? Well, I think because it's important to sell your program both now and for the future administration. It's important to go up there and let congress know, as we said before, congress will be putting together a budget regardless of whether they hold on to that budget for a new president or not, congress will be doing the work and putting together a budget, and so it's important for you to go up there and talk about your program and why they're so important, even if it's going to be signed by a new administration.

Another reason is because you're building relationships. Well you want to build relationships with your senators, with your congressmen, with your state

legislators, you want to build relationships and I hope Chris touches a little bit upon this during his talk about why those relationships are so important.

And you really want to become a trusted source of information. We say it all the time, even if you are not allowed to directly advocate for a certain program due to state restrictions or your boss says you can't, it's important that you become a trusted kind of source of information for when congressmen or senators offices call you and ask you for that kind of real time information about what's happening in their state and how the money's being spent in this state, that's a very important question we get asked all the time, what is this money actually paying for, and you want to be able to give somebody information that they know is true and they know is happening, so that they can sell it to their boss.

Just quickly, AMCHP works two ways. First of all, we work with Julio on kind of the overall pot of money, and what I mean by that is, we work with Julio's organizations, other organizations to try to get as much money as we possibly can in the overall pot for health programs for the nation before we start working on the exact amount for the Title V block grant.

And obviously you can figure out yourself if there's more funds in that overall pot of money, one would think there would be more money enough for all the individual programs that fall under that.

And so that's the two kind of things that we focus on, and Julio's going to talk a little bit more about that kind of overall pot of money in the work that the coalition for health funding does around that specifically.

AMCHP works as we talked about before includes hill visits that we do ourselves. We do that coalition building with other organizations. Our CEO Mike mentioned the friends of Title V before, that's other organizations we bring together to support and talk about the maternal and child health block grant.

However, we really need that push from the state. And I'll be completely honest with you, I go up to the hill every year and I try to meet with every congressional member, every senator's staff that I can. But they see me year after year, and I kind of make the joke that I go up there and I get in line with all the other lobbyists and we kind of get five minutes at best, and we kind of give our pitch and then we're gone and somebody else is in there advocating for something else. There's some members who won't even meet with me unless I'm from their state.

They tell me, well, you're a lobbyist, you're from Washington, D.C. we're not going to meet with you unless you can actually vote me into office. So we need that kind of underneath push from your state to go along with AMCHP's work that we do on a national level to make sure that the maternal and child health block gets fully funded at that 850 million dollar mark.

We mentioned this before how you can specifically help. We hope you talk about MCH programs as much as possible. We said this before where we hope you talk about it with your colleagues who may not know that much about it, we hope you talk about it with your bosses that may be supportive, but perhaps not know in detail all the work that you guys are doing just so we can really get the voice of maternal and child health out among the general public.

We hope you visit with your leadership when you're here in Washington, D.C. certainly AMCHP will help you kind of make those visits. If you need us to go with you, we're happy to do that. But I think just as important if not important is to try to make some of these visits when your congressional members go back home on breaks.

And again if you're not quite sure when there's a break, when your is going to be home, AMCHP can get you that information, we certainly can try to help you set something up and get you materials that you can use yourself to take in to make these meetings.

Again, we talk about the resource for accurate information. If you're unable to advocate directly yourself, we hope you kind of connect with perhaps state groups that can do advocacy work. We all know Family Voices is a fantastic job, the AAP has several chapters in all the states, the March of Dimes has chapters

in all the states. They perhaps have less restrictions than you do as a state employee.

We hope that you at least connect with these groups to feed them information about the important work the maternal and child health programs are doing. And we talk a lot about telling your story.

One thing I think we always say is that Title V programs are really collecting and sitting on this mountain of very important information. It's just how do you tell the story from that information, how do you take that data that you're collecting, how do you take those numbers that you're collecting and make it real to a congressional member and actually tell your story about why your program is so important. That's just the last slide we use.

I'm very happy to turn it over to these two. I'm first going to, as I say, have Julio come up. Julio again is the is the President of the Coalition For Health Funding. He's going to talk to us hopefully about his lessons that he learned over the past few years how congress has responded to a lot of those messages about funding health programs and general more, and then we're going to ask Chris to give us kind of the insider's perspective. But Julio, thank you.