

Moving the Transplant Public Policy Agenda Forward in Challenging Political Times

More than the weather and humidity have been heating up in our nation's Capitol these last two years. In a few short months, the November midterm elections will take place. All 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate will face re-election. At stake are the majority control and margins in both bodies of Congress. Although the White House is not in play, the midterm elections are frequently viewed as a referendum on the performance and agenda of the current Administration. Both sides of the aisle in Congress will either defend or run against the Obama Administration and the Congressional Majority party's policies and proposals. The issue of health care reform has certainly been on the front burners of this Congress, Administration....and now the 2010 election cycle.

Despite the politics and sometimes "viral" partisan politics on Capitol Hill, from day one in this 111th Session of Congress the American Society of Transplantation (AST) has successfully advanced a strong legislative and regulatory transplantation public policy agenda. The Society has spent years educating and cultivating Members of Congress from both the Democratic and Republican sides of the aisle. Our organization's bipartisan approach to lobbying and advocacy has proven successful regardless of the majority party in Congress or the White House. The simple fact is that the gift of life is a non-partisan issue.

As you may know, AST has made quick in-roads and established dialogues with many of the new political appointees and decision-makers within the Obama Administration, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as well as other targeted health care agencies. During the past 18 months, AST continued to be the key leader and voice on Capitol Hill negotiating and securing patient immunosuppression provisions in the House version of the Health Care Reform Act. Although immuno provisions were not included in the final health reform law, Congressional leaders from both the Democratic and Republican parties have reiterated their support and commitment to completing action on this imperative coverage for transplant patients. In the last month, AST has spent considerable time with Congressional leaders developing additional strategies to ensure final passage of the patient immunosuppressive drug coverage legislation. AST's exhaustive efforts continue to include daily lobbying on Capitol

Hill, close interaction and coordination with the Transplant Roundtable and other transplant stakeholder organizations, outreach to national media and continuous communication with the Obama Administration.

In addition to the Society's long-term commitment to seeing transplant patients receive their immunosuppressive medications, AST has also been leading an effort to educate and mobilize support for increased funding levels at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). This effort has included direct advocacy by AST's lobbyists in Washington, DC, grassroots letters and emails from the Society's membership, and working closely with the NIH research stakeholder community. Last Thursday, these efforts paid off when a House Appropriations Subcommittee approved a \$1 billion boost to the NIH funding level. AST continues to meet daily with House and Senate Appropriations Committee members and staff to educate them on the work of the transplant research community.

AST has also been working very closely with the FDA and HRSA to identify and further policy initiatives to strengthen transplantation, and several joint initiatives will be moving forward in the coming months. Some of these efforts have been independent, yet many have involved collaboration with other Societies and organizations. In the next year, we anticipate working with other important Agencies including the HHS Agency for Health Care Research and Quality (AHRQ).

Passage earlier this year of the health care reform law is something that AST and its team in Washington, DC have focused significant energies on since the beginning of this session of Congress. In addition to seeking the reform as a legislative vehicle for our patient immunosuppression bill, the Society has also worked diligently to weigh-in on areas of the new law that will or may impact the field and practice of solid organ transplantation. These efforts have included working closely with the HHS and CMS as the new legislation is interpreted and implemented by the Federal Agencies. New coverages and regulations have already begun to roll out of the Agencies. Many more will be developed and issued between now and 2014. AST has worked to ensure that it has a seat at the table throughout the multi-year regulatory implementation process for development of new health care regulations and rules. Some of this has already involved working with both Congress and the Agencies to define "Congressional Intent" as federal bureaucrats interpret and apply the new law.

In addition to the work of the AST lobbying team, the Society's Public Policy Committee and Board of Directors have upcoming Fly-ins to Capitol Hill in September and February, respectively. These visits allow AST's leadership and Public Policy Committee to personally deliver the Society's advocacy messages to their elected officials and House and Senate leaders.

We look forward to continuing to keep you informed of AST's public policy activities and successes. The Society's strong visibility and influence on Capitol Hill and within the Executive Branch provide the transplant community with a strong voice as well as the ability to shape the health care landscape.

Sincerely,

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