



BULLSEYE OR ...

Why We Went on the Grassroots Lobbying Trip to Harrisburg on May 5, 2008

by Eileen Anderson

Many days I'd like to take a match to the newspaper because of the relentless parade of stories about Harrisburg wrongdoing. Some may conclude that it's not worth the time to bother with elected officials. So why do SMC members take the time and visit the Hill? We go because we believe that beneath all the dirt and grime our system of government works.

"When we join together and speak collectively our voices will be heard on the important issues. We must do everything within our power to encourage small businesses and entrepreneurs. Big things start small. We are the future. We are the people we have been waiting for."

– Eileen Anderson

We go because of Martin Luther King who said, "History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people."

By the time you read this our contingent of 30 + SMC members will have returned from our May 5

Grassroots Lobbying trip to Harrisburg. We are fortunate to have as SMC President Lee Taddonio, who served ten years in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and has a wealth of information to share with and guide SMC members. We rolled up our sleeves and walked the halls visiting lawmaker's offices. Here are several of the key pieces of legislation we spoke about.

HB 2005 – Insurance Market Reform is on its Way to the Senate!!!

SMC has been very active on HB 2005 and put on a strong push last fall. This is a central component of our health care cost containment agenda and a measure that we have long advocated. SMC faxed a letter in Support of HB 2005 to all southwestern PA legislators several days before the intended vote on March 31. On April 1, the House of Representatives cast a final vote (131-72) on House Bill 2005.

There will be no "Time Outs" or resting on our laurels. The Senate is where the real work begins and our grassroots lobbying efforts will be put to the test. HB 2005 bill will eliminate the use of gender and medical underwriting and create a single, uniform rating requirement – adjusted community rating – that would be applicable to all insurance carriers in the small group market. Rates may be adjusted for age, geographic

region, and family composition. It will help to reduce premium volatility and will enable small employers to continue offering job-based coverage.

HB 2028 – Reauthorize of the Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council (PHC4)

The greatest challenge to our health care system is to control cost growth. Quality outcomes are not always related to price. Price and quality must merge to create value and eliminate the estimated 40 percent of spending that is wasteful. We need to give bargaining power - clear pricing and quality information - to employers and consumers. PHC4 is the only independent state agency in the country to collect, analyze, and publish provider payment and health care quality data on a hospital by hospital basis.

SMC strongly supports PHC4 reauthorization and continuance of its health care quality measurement and improvement work. We applaud their groundbreaking work in hospital-acquired infections (HAI). In 2005, PHC4 issued the first hospital specific report on HAI in the nation, truly a breakthrough in the national push for transparency.

HB 2400 – Independent Contractor Status

HB 2400 has been introduced in the State House and is scheduled to be considered by the State Labor Relations Committee on May 6. The legislation starts with the faulty premise that everyone is an employee and then requires the employer to prove otherwise. Employers who intentionally or unintentionally misclassify employees as independent contractors are subject to criminal fines, prison time, the loss of government contracts, and are subject to civil damages by the employees who were improperly classified as independent contractors.

This bill essentially will take business owners off the shop floor and into the courtroom to prove that their mutually agreeable relationships with independent contractors are still appropriate. While we have been working to fix current law because it is too vague about the distinction between an employee and an independent contractor, this is an extreme reaction championed by the labor unions.

Next Stop — The annual Washington Presentation to Congress in Washington, D.C, June 3-4. See you there? ▼

Editor's Note: Eileen Anderson is vice president of Red Clay Tile Works and manager of Government Relations at SMC Business Councils. She can be reached via phone at 412-342-1606 or e-mail, redclay@city-net.com