

From the December 2010 SRS Newsletter:

HOW TO OBTAIN A PROCLAMATION FOR A CAUSE FROM THE STATE'S GOVERNOR.

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As one of its projects over the last few years, the Advocacy & Public Policy Committee of the SRS sought to have a month of the year declared as Scoliosis Awareness Month by the states' governors. This initiative was started to raise the public's awareness of scoliosis since school screening has been deemed unsupportable based in information examined by the U.S. Taskforce on Prevention and is no longer mandated or supported in many jurisdictions. What a better way to make people aware than a governor's proclamation. A governor's willingness to do this shows interest in the public's welfare which in turn makes the issue seem important and stimulates the people to seek advice if they suspect the deformity. Members of the Advocacy Committee and others in the SRS were encouraged to have that proclamation made in their particular states. However, the individuals who decided to pursue this task were basically left to their own devices to get the job done. As with most endeavors of this kind, it soon becomes obvious that the task is not as easy as imagined because most of us do not have ready access to or even personally know the governors of our states. And, like with most things political, "connections" are essential to accomplish the task. An intermediary is needed to "GREASE THE WHEELS".

Imagine my own dilemma! I had just arrived in West Virginia in January of this year when I was made aware of this initiative during a committee conference call. At the time, I barely knew who our governor was, much less having any relationship with him or even knowing whom I might ask to intervene. As luck would have it, as a new faculty member I spent a good part of the first few weeks of my new gig going around meeting various clinical and administrative types, and I happened to meet with one of the hospital vice presidents who indicated in our discussions that he was a personal friend of the governor's and attended WVU sporting events and social functions with him. BINGO! I broached the subject of the proclamation with him and he assured me it would be no problem. He contacted one of the governor's assistants to whom I provided a little blurb about scoliosis and the importance of making the public aware and soon the Proclamation was on my desk, beautifully bound and signed by Joe Manchin, Governor of the Great State of West Virginia!

Well, I guess that's a little bit of a tongue-in-cheek story. But it does emphasize that to accomplish tasks like this one needs some kind of connection, unless, of course, one already has ready access to the person who will ultimately do what's being requested. I seriously doubt a letter out-of-the-blue from me to Joe Manchin would have developed any traction. My chance encounter with the hospital VP did the trick. But there are other ways of doing this. Basically anyone interested in getting this done in their state

should contact local county/city or state politicians, Also congressmen and senators could be helpful as well. There needs to be, it seems, some identifiable person-to-person interaction to get the ball rolling. The caveat is that follow-up is needed. Things done by government and politicians are not done efficiently and expeditiously as they are in orthopaedic surgery. So, once the contact is made, inquiries as to the progress of the task need to be made periodically. In my case, I stressed the time frame of June needing to be designated Scoliosis Awareness Month, so we were under some pressure to complete the process by then. I made it clear that that was the timeline. Fortunately it all came to fruition as planned.

So, for anyone seeking to pursue this initiative, identify an intermediary who has direct access to the person who will make the decision (in this case the state governor). Plead your case by providing information and a strong statement about the importance of the issue especially the human impact. If the issue involves children, it becomes perhaps a bit easier since most politicians, and people in general, have a soft spot for kids. **SO GO ON OUT THERE INTO GOVERNOR TERRITORY AND “GET ‘ER DONE!”**