

→ NOVEMBER 2008

CLUB BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL

40 Still in the Leede

51 European Update

56 The 3 Cs of F&B

63 Big Losers' Win

66 Design Differences

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JANE FRAZIER OF ANYTIME FITNESS
EMBARKS ON HER FIRST
IHRSA LEGISLATIVE SUMMIT



John Harrington

Inside the 2008 IHRSA Legislative Summit

The industry's passion and impressive product prove persuasive to legislators

By Thomas Richards

The months leading up to the 6th Annual IHRSA Legislative Summit were busier and more promising than ever. New developments were unfolding—some big, some subtle—that suggested that the possibility of Congress adopting preventive healthcare policies was gaining greater traction. There were legislative briefings on Capitol Hill, major studies released, and even joint-bipartisan press conferences extolling the virtues of prevention.

In fact, it's quite possible that, during those months, the need for preventive healthcare policies was the *only* point of agreement between the two leading candidates in the race for President of the United States.

Senator Barack Obama (D-IL), the then-presumptive Democratic nominee, told a crowd in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, "We are going to emphasize prevention, so that we have an actual healthcare system—instead of a disease-care system."

Image left: Rep. Richard Neal (D-MA), r., confers with Summit attendees, from l., David Kastin, of Town Sports International Holdings, Inc.; former IHRSA Chairperson Michael Levy; and club owners Roberta and Lloyd Gainsboro, Dedham Health and Athletic Complex

His Republican counterpart, Senator John McCain (R-AZ), declared at a rally in Florida, “The best care is preventative care.” A few days later, at a gathering in Colorado, Senator McCain would speak of a “need to encourage membership at a health club.”

And so it was amid a clamor of hopeful determined calls for prevention that this year’s Summit attendees—setting yet another attendance record—would arrive in Washington, D.C., to continue to educate the nation’s leaders about the preventive benefits of exercise.

“Regular exercise, a healthy diet, and smart lifestyle choices are the most effective preventive healthcare practices that anyone can follow,” explained Joe Moore, IHRSA’s president and CEO, in welcoming Summit participants. “If we are to improve America’s health and control the costs of obesity and chronic disease, we need a federal environment that supports exercise and other forms of preventive care.”

Specifically, the Summit attendees were in the nation’s capital to advocate for the passage of the Workforce Health Improvement Program (WHIP) and the Personal Health Investment Today (PHIT) Acts.

The WHIP Act would correct the current tax inequity that treats an employee’s membership to a fitness center located on a company’s premises differently than membership at an offsite facility. The PHIT Act would allow Americans to pay for various physical activities—such as membership to a health club—with pre-tax dollars from a tax-favored account (e.g., flexible spending account, health savings account, medical savings account) or, in some cases, deduct such expenses as “qualified medical expenses.”

The Summit offered attendees a full slate of events intertwined with pivotal legislative meetings on Capitol Hill. The first day included a morning workout at Sports Club/LA; an orientation for first-time attendees; an issue-briefing luncheon; a panel discussion, titled “Working Together for a Healthier America;” and an evening networking reception. It concluded with dinner at the City Club of Washington, a ClubCorp facility, which was highlighted by a presentation by renowned communications expert Frank Luntz.

The following day consisted of a continental breakfast; a presentation by famed political consultant and media personality James Carville; a lunch on Capitol Hill; and a closing reception.

It wasn’t the events, however—no matter how well planned or executed—that guaranteed the success of the Summit. That determination was made, as it is every year, by the passion of the attendees. And, by that measure, this year’s Summit was a smashing success.

The attendees were a manifold lot, largely defying easy categorization. There were first-time and six-time attendees, executive staff and front-line employees, political and nonpolitical



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folks—all united by a single goal: to educate Congress about the unique and meaningful role that the health club industry can play in the nation’s battles with obesity and runaway health-care costs. “The passion of fitness professionals, combined with their ability to share real-life stories about the importance of exercise, makes them excellent advocates for both WHIP and PHIT,” observed Congressman Zach Wamp (R-TN), the founder and co-chair of the Congressional Fitness Caucus. →

Inside the 2008 IHRSA Legislative Summit

INSIDERS' PERSPECTIVES ON POLITICAL PROSELYTIZING

The following industry advocates offered their first-hand accounts of this year's Summit experience: Lana Carson, the owner of The Omni Fitness Club, in Muskegon, Michigan; Jane Frazier, owner, and Sarah Zelinkas, office manager, of Anytime Fitness, in Dubuque, Iowa; Ken Butler, general manager, Plus One, in Greenwich, Rhode Island; and Julie Main, former IHRSA president and general partner of the West Coast Athletic Clubs, in Santa Barbara, California.

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Sarah Zelinkas

Ken Butler

Jane Frazier

Julie Main

IHRSA: How did you feel about the Summit prior to your arrival?

Zelinkas: I was actually a little nervous. I really didn't know very much about lobbying or how it worked, but once I arrived and started meeting people who were there for the same reasons I was, my nerves were put to rest.

Frazier: I felt honored to be invited to take part in something so big. After familiarizing myself with the WHIP and PHIT legislative proposals, I got very excited about the possibilities for healthcare savings and industry growth.

IHRSA: Did you enjoy the social aspects of the Summit?

Zelinkas: The social aspect of the Summit was top-of-the-line. I felt so welcome, and so lucky to be there with all of the guests and all of the other people involved.

Frazier: I was pleasantly surprised by the organization of the event and the friendliness of the IHRSA staff. Because this was my first Summit, a few IHRSA staff members attended a couple of the meetings with me to provide moral support.

IHRSA: Do you feel as though you "made a difference" by coming to the Summit? Were the legislative officials interested in what you had to say?

Butler: Yes. I shared members' stories, as well as my own personal account of surviving both cancer and a heart attack. Such stories are the driving force, the real human reason, for pushing for legislative changes. They help make the case that regular exercise can improve the quality of life, as well as the speed of recovery if, and when, an illness strikes—that, in turn, will reduce the cost of healthcare.

Frazier: They were all genuinely interested in what we were saying and agreed that changes need to be made.

IHRSA: Would you recommend the Summit to other club operators?

Carson: Absolutely. What we do individually and within the confines of our clubs can only accomplish so much. The momentum required to grow our industry and improve the nation's health will come only by working together and focusing on the big picture. Attending the Summit doesn't take time away from your business—it helps ensure that you'll have a business in the future!

“The Summit is an awesome event, and I feel that everyone should have a chance to experience it at least once.”

Butler: Yes! You really don't have to be an expert lobbyist; you just need to share your passion as a fitness professional and your knowledge of the benefits of physical activity for everyone.

Zelinkas: Without a doubt. The Summit is an awesome event, and I feel that everyone should have a chance to experience it at least once.

Main: I recommend it to other club operators every chance I get! —

— Tom Richards, tgr@ihrsa.org



Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA), Zelinkas, m., Frazier, r.



Rick Holder, Hampshire Hills Sports and Fitness Club, L., Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH)



Maria Whitlow, L., Lana Carson, Omni Fitness Club, former Michigan Senator Don Riegler

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