

March of Dimes

November 2003

Advocacy Update *from the Office of Government Affairs*



Congress Passes “Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities Prevention Act of 2003”

On November 20, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the “Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities Act,” S286 which had been approved unanimously by the Senate on November 11. The bill reauthorizes until 2007 the data collection and research activities supported by the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In a press statement released when the House vote was taken, Dr. Jennifer L. Howse, president of the March of Dimes, said that “the ‘Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities Prevention Act of 2003’ reaffirms the national commitment to preventing birth defects and developmental disabilities, the principal cause of infant mortality and a major threat to children’s health. Although

birth defects are responsible for over 20 percent of infant deaths, the causes of about two-thirds of birth defects are currently unknown. Birth defects surveillance and information gathering is fundamental to the research being done to find the causes of birth defects.”

President Bush is expected to sign the legislation within the next two weeks.

Health Funding Bill Still in Flux

As of press time, Congress is still working on the appropriations bill to fund health-related activities in FY 2004, which started October 1, 2003. Congressional leaders report that House and Senate negotiators are close to a final agreement on an “omnibus” bill, which will include funding for the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education agencies.

March of Dimes continues to advocate for the highest possible fund-

ing level for the National Institutes of Health and other priority programs. In addition, the March of Dimes is strongly supporting inclusion of three specific items in the final conference committee agreement: \$2 million first-time funding for the Title 26 newborn screening program; a \$1.5 million increase for the regional Centers for Birth Defects Research and Prevention; and a \$300,000 increase for folic acid education. The final funding levels for these and other programs of particular interest to March of Dimes will be detailed in the next issue of the *Advocacy Update*.

Next Issue of *Advocacy Update*

November is the last issue for 2003. Thank you for a very successful year.

In a continuing effort to help the Foundation meet its budget goals, in 2004 the Office of Government Affairs will publish the *Advocacy Update* on a quarterly basis.



March of Dimes Mourns Loss of Sheila Smythe, Long Time Volunteer

**The Following March of Dimes Obituary Appeared in the New York Times on
November 6, 2003**

“The March of Dimes mourns the loss of Sheila Mary Smythe, one of our most dedicated national volunteer leaders, who passed away on November 4, 2003. A volunteer since 1985, she provided thoughtful advice and governance. Miss Smythe began her commitment to the March of Dimes mission in 1985 when she served as Chair of the Public Affairs Committee of its Greater New York Chapter. In 1989, Miss Smythe was elected to the National Board of Trustees of the March of Dimes. She served on the Board’s Executive Committee from 1991 until 2000, and chaired the Public Affairs Committee from 1990 through 1997. She also served on the Board’s Finance and Audit, Pensions Investment, and Nominating Committees, serving as Chair of the last in

1998 and 1999. In 1998, she was elected Secretary of the National Board. She faithfully and diligently fulfilled her ten-year service to the Board in 2000. At the time of her death, Miss Smythe was an Honorary Trustee, and Chair of the Public Policy Advisory Council. Her quality commitment to the March of Dimes mission of protecting and improving the health of children never ceased. Miss Smythe had a long and distinguished career in public health and education, serving both in government and the private sector. She was Executive Vice President and Dean of the School of Public Health, New York Medical College, Valhalla, N.Y., and Professor of Health Policy and Economics there. Previously she served as Chief Health Policy Advisor for the U.S. General Accounting Office.”

The *Advocacy Update* delivers legislative news about March of Dimes issues on a monthly basis.

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Happy Holidays!

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