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## Advocacy Update

Editor: Joseph Luchok

Direct Questions or  
Comments to:

## DR. JENNIFER L. HOWSE PRESENTS PINS TO IDENTIFY "PREEMIE" BILL COSPONSORS

On March 28, at the National Area Chapter's Gourmet Gala, Dr. Jennifer L. Howse, President of the March of Dimes, pinned pink and blue ribbons on the lapels of "PREEMIE" bill cosponsors so that the nearly 1,000 event attendees could appreciate the depth of support for enactment of the measure.



**Dr. Jennifer L. Howse pins a pink and blue ribbon on Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN) as Char Lugar watches**

## "PREEMIE" BILL GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN PRODUCING GREAT RESULTS

Since October 2005, when the grassroots campaign to engage volunteers and staff began, 32 Senators and 53 Representatives have signed on as cosponsors of the "PREEMIE" bill. This brings the total number of bill sponsors to 63 in the House and 1/3 of the United States Senate.

March of Dimes Birth  
Defects Foundation  
Office of Government  
Affairs  
1146 19<sup>th</sup> Street N.W.  
6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington D.C. 20036

Phone: (202) 659-1800  
Fax: (202) 296-2964

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March of Dimes volunteers and staff are poised to raise awareness and gain additional sponsors of this important bill through various Walk-related activities. Thousands of postcards signed by WalkAmerica participants from across the nation will be delivered to the offices of Senate and House members. In addition, op-eds are being submitted to major newspapers, with placements already appearing in Orlando, Florida and Corpus Christi, Texas.

Much has been done but enactment of the bill requires continued efforts by volunteers and staff in every state.

## **GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN HAS EARLY SUCCESS ON FEDERAL BUDGET RESOLUTION**

In a year when funding is expected to be extremely tight, the public health community achieved a significant victory which could result in additional resources for public health programs for Fiscal Year 2007 (FY07). Federal support for public health programs has been reduced due to several years of budget cuts. In Fiscal Year 2006 public health programs lost over \$1 billion in needed funding. To deal with the problem, during senate consideration of the budget resolution, Senators Arlen Specter (R-PA) and Tom Harkin (D-IA) offered an amendment adding \$7 billion to the funding level recommended by the Budget Committee. The amendment was approved by a strong bipartisan vote of 73 to 27.

What had been expected to be a very close vote turned out to be an overwhelming victory for the public health community, due in no small part to the grassroots efforts of the following March of Dimes Chapters: Maine, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island and Texas. These Chapters activated their grassroots volunteer networks and all the Senators contacted by the March of Dimes voted for the amendment.

The budget resolution is the framework within which the appropriations committees will determine FY07 funding levels for discretionary accounts including those that affect the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Health Resources and Services Administration, among other Health and Human Services agencies.

This victory is just the first step in ensuring that adequate funding levels are included in the final budget resolution. The March of Dimes, along with the entire public health community, is advocating for inclusion of a similar amendment in the House budget resolution and will also push for its approval as part of the final conference agreement.

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## REGION REPORTS

### NORTH



**New Hampshire's First Lady  
Dr. Susan Lynch kicks off  
the 2005 Concord Walk**

“New Hampshire’s First Family Invites Your Family to Walk for Someone You Love.” Dr. Susan Lynch, wife of New Hampshire Governor John Lynch, is delivering this invitation to all state residents in her second year as the Chapter’s Honorary WalkAmerica Chairperson. Dr. Lynch, a pediatrician, hosted the Concord Leadership Breakfast and is featured in public service announcements airing on the local ABC television station. The First Family will lead the Concord Walk, which begins and ends at the State House.

The Maine and Vermont Chapters also enjoy strong relationships with their first families. In Maine, Governor John Baldacci hosts an annual golf outing in coordination with the Chapter, and Mrs. Karen Baldacci serves as the State Prematurity Campaign Chair. In Vermont, First Lady Dorothy Douglas continues in her second year as the State Prematurity Campaign Chair. Governor and Mrs. Douglas both participate in many March of Dimes special events during the year.

#### **Lobby Day Events**

Northern Region Chapters are taking state capitols by storm with a flurry of Lobby Day events to advance Foundation-wide advocacy priorities. Since the beginning of the year Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, New York, Maine, Minnesota, Vermont, and Wisconsin have conducted legislative events at their state houses. Mission families and youth are a growing part of the advocacy effort

in all states.

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## SOUTH

The Florida Chapter recently held its Lobby Day in Tallahassee, advocating on behalf of several programs that provide important services to pregnant women and those of childbearing age, infants, and children. In preparation for legislative meetings, the Chapter held a training session on youth involvement in advocacy. Members of the Chapter's Chain Reaction group and the Collegiate Council were present to address volunteers and meet with elected officials. The focus of the day's events was to convince legislators to expand eligibility and access to the Florida KidCare Program, to reaffirm support for expansion of Florida's Newborn Screening program, and to support initiatives designed to ensure that pregnant women and children have access to appropriate and comprehensive Medicaid benefits, including early and periodic screening, diagnosis and treatment (EPSDT).

During their visit to Tallahassee, volunteers and staff were able to meet with Lt. Gov. Toni Jennings to discuss the Chapter's 2006 legislative priorities.



**Pictured from left: Penelope Tiam-Fook, Lead Public Affairs Staff; Tamara Yang Demko, volunteer; DeeJay Hellrung, Southern Region NOV Representative for Public Affairs; Jackie McLamore, volunteer; Lt. Gov. Jennings; Vivian Booth, Chapter Public Affairs Committee volunteer; Dr. Louise Ritchie, volunteer; Joan Hulett, volunteer; Paul Hunt, Chapter Public Affairs Committee Co-Chair; and Michael Dobson, the Chapter's legislative consultant.**

The Missouri Chapter recently held a Lobby Day in Jefferson City. March of Dimes volunteers and staff advocated in support of several programs important to the health of mothers, infants, and children. Special emphasis was given to protecting eligibility and benefits under Medicaid and SCHIP, as

well as expansion of the state's newborn screening program.

During the day's activities, Chapter volunteers and staff presented a check representing the March of Dimes investment in Missouri to Governor Matt Blunt.



**Pictured from left: Representative Tom Dempsey; Debbie Kersting, State Director; Joe Pierle, Chapter Public Affairs Committee Chair; Molly Tallarico, St. Louis Division PAC Co-Chair; Mike Brady, St. Louis Division Board Member; Joan Barry, St. Louis Division PAC Co-Chair; John Tvrdik, St. Louis Division Treasurer; Dr. Aaron Hamvas, Chapter Program Service Committee Chair; John Spesia, St. Louis Division Board Chair; and Governor Blunt.**

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## WEST

Several western Chapters have already achieved significant advocacy “wins” for 2006. The Colorado Chapter worked with the health department to lead the effort to improve data collected by the birth defects surveillance system for fetal alcohol syndrome by increasing the age limit for FAS testing from 6 to 10 years of age. In a legislative session that lasted only four weeks, the New Mexico Chapter worked to restore 12 months continuous eligibility for children and pregnant women who rely on Medicaid for their health insurance. The Idaho Chapter was successful on a Chapter choice issue, defeating attempts to pass legislation that would have criminalized women who used drugs during their pregnancy.

Westerners are also thinking media. Chapters across the region are proactively garnering media coverage for their legislative initiatives. The Idaho Chapter has already generated coverage on legislation dealing with drug

abuse during pregnancy and both Kansas and Texas racked up media impressions for expanded newborn screening initiatives.

The Texas Chapter recently launched a NICU Family Support project in Austin. Always looking to integrate public affairs and build relationships, the Chapter invited State Representative Elliott Naishtat to attend the kick-off at Seton Hospital.



**Pictured from left: March of Dimes NICU Family Support Specialist, Elizabeth Garza; Austin Division Executive Director, MaryAnn Maltz; State Representative Elliott Naishtat; State Director of Public Affairs, Morgan Walthall**

And last, but certainly not least, Chapters continue to recruit cosponsors for the PREEMIE bill. This update just in—Kansas, North Dakota and Oregon have each rounded up an additional co-sponsor. In other good news, South Dakota and Hawaii successfully recruited 100 percent of their Congressional delegations.