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# PROCTOR ALUMNI CALL

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REV. CASPAR JAMES GREEN

My name is Caspar Green. I'm a pastor serving in Glens Falls, New York, way up in the Adirondack Mountains near Vermont, and last month I attended my first Proctor Institute. I knew I wanted to do more for children here at home, so one of the workshops I attended at Proctor was the one called, *Bringing Child Advocacy Home*. In that workshop, CDF staff members gave ideas for some concrete steps I could take to follow up with all the phone calls we were making during the week of the Institute. After the workshop, Scott Jacobsen, one of CDF's staff members, helped me map out a strategy for approaching my Congressman, Scott Murphy, for an in-office visit.

I am active on my local Democratic Committee, so I had worked on my Congressman's election campaign, making phone calls and attending rallies when he was elected in a special election last year. I knew my Congressman was a dad like me and comes from a large family and had worked in small business start-ups before being elected to Congress.

When I got home from Proctor, I went on my Congressman's web site and found a link to "Request a Meeting." On that request page, I pasted in CDF's health priorities for children that we had been given at Proctor. I tweaked it a little to make it sound more like a letter than a statement, and then added a paragraph at the end that was a kind of shameless dad-to-dad appeal about how our kids had played together offstage at one of his campaign rallies, and how I knew he would agree about the importance of our children.

The next day I got an email back from my Congressman's staff saying his district director would like to meet with me. After a few calls and emails, we set up a meeting for this past Friday morning. That's when the nerves started to set in. I decided I'd better do some homework to be ready, so I read and reread all the "Children's Health Priorities" and "Talking Points" handouts we had received at Proctor. And then, when I found out about a town hall meeting with Congressman Murphy in a nearby town, I went to listen. I had heard that a lot of these town hall meetings were pretty wild, so I wasn't sure what to expect, but at the one I went to, things remained civil and respectful. It turned out to be very helpful. I didn't ask a question myself at the town hall, but it gave me a chance to hear where the

Congressman was on the health care issue, and gave me some ideas for which of the talking points and CDF information would be most useful. I also took some time to recall a few stories from my own congregation of children and their parents whose experience with the health care system I know.

Then, last Friday morning, I walked from my office at church over to my Congressman's office a block down the street. I was really nervous, because even though I have often sent emails and made phone calls to my elected representatives, this was my first time to go and sit down with someone in their office face to face. I felt like those 9 million kids - you know all those kids without a vote - were watching me walk down the street. It was a lot of pressure, but then I thought of my kid playing with his kids next to the stage at that rally last year, and that helped me to remember that this meeting was about one dad asking another dad to do what's right, and that helped me to relax a little.

When I got there, the meeting went well. I found out a lot more about the Congressman's thinking on the health care issues. My Congressman, with his business background, was concerned about the costs of the health care bill, so I started with the talking points about how children are the least expensive to cover. When I gave the district director the Rush Amendments hand-out, he was very receptive. He looked them over carefully and thought they were going to be helpful additions to the health care bill. He wanted to send a copy to the Congressman right away. We talked about how the Congressman shares our concern that children in different states get different coverage. He really wants that issue to be addressed in whatever health care reform legislation gets passed.

In all, we talked for about a half hour. We ended the conversation on a positive note. Turns out the district director is a dad, too. I reminded him that this fall the "No Child Left Behind" legislation comes up for renewal and that I would like to have another visit with him later this year. He said, "Yes, you mean how we have to fix this 'Every child left behind' issue. Yes, let's talk again in the fall."

I came away feeling that the visit had been helpful and had raised children's health to a leading concern of my Congressman in this debate, whatever form the legislation eventually takes. More than that, I got my foot in the door to advocate for children with him in the future. I am thankful to the Proctor Institute, to Marian Wright Edelman for her inspiration, and to her staff at CDF for their help and encouragement. Thanks to Shannon Daley-Harris for the invitation to share this with you all today. I look forward to advocating for children even more in the future and hope you will, too.