

AHA Advocacy Day

February 13, 2013

By Lee Byrd

ASHHRA Board member Kristen Fox, MBA, SPHR, from Kadlec Health System Richland, Wash., and I, member of the ASHHRA Advocacy Committee, had the opportunity to attend the AHA Advocacy Day representing ASHHRA on February 13, 2013. Mr. Rick Pollack, AHA executive VP, advocacy and public policy, and Tom Nickels, AHA senior vice president, federal relations, gave us a brief update on the fiscal cliff and the potential implications to health care facilities with sequestering. Our mission was to urge our legislators to reject any additional cuts to Medicare and Medicaid payments for hospital services.

With our mission, we had pertinent information related to the impact health care facilities have on the economy. One of these is that health care is the second largest private sector of employment only surpassed by restaurants and food service establishments. Secondly, in many communities, hospitals are one of the largest employers that represent jobs which are vital to the local economy. Another critical point is that employee labor costs comprise 60-70 percent of a hospital's expenses, and any further potential cuts to Medicare or Medicaid could result in a reduction in force, which would have a negative impact on employment in each locality. The final concern was that with the expected 20 plus million additional people being covered under the Accountable Care Act (ACA), hospitals need the staff necessary to provide health care services to avoid the looming manpower shortages that health care facilities will be facing as these 20 million pursue our services.

So with our mission and with our key points to educate our legislators, we met with our legislators. For those of you that have never visited your legislator in their Washington, D.C. office, usually you meet with their aides since the legislator is many times in meetings or voting. Over the course of the day we met with the following legislator's offices: Congressman Bobby Scott- VA; House Majority Leader Eric Cantor-VA; Senator Tim Kaine-VA; Senator Patty Murray-WA; Senator Maria Cantwell-WA; and a face to face meeting with Congressman Doc Hastings-WA, since my colleague Kristen is his constituent!

Everyone was very engaged when we met, and all were in agreement that the country needs to resolve the budget and the sequestering issue. So we were pleased that our voices were clearly heard and all of the folks with whom we met appreciated our insights into health care. We took the opportunity to offer our willingness to serve as resources to them with respect to contacting us should they want citizen feedback on the health care frontline.

Our message to all ASHHRA members--be in contact with your elected representatives; they **DO** want to hear from you, and you do have a voice!

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