



## URGENT INFORMATION FOR ACA MEMBERS—IMPACT OF MID-TERM ELECTIONS ON PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING

The 2014 Mid-term elections saw the Republican Party surge triumphantly back into electoral politics as the Grand Old Party strengthened its majority in the U.S. House of Representatives, retook control of the U.S. Senate for the first time in eight years and won a number of gubernatorial races, which included some states that President Obama easily carried in 2012. Now that these races are behind us and these new officials get ready to be sworn in, some basic questions arise. What do those victories mean for the counseling profession? What is the possible impact of a Republican controlled Congress? What will the relationship be between the President and Congressional Leaders? And what do the results mean in gubernatorial contests that were held?



So what is the central message that we need to take away from these elections? Well, as we stated in our earlier report, there is still a lot of work to do when it comes to advocating for the profession. All ACA members have a charge to keep; we all have to do what we can to educate new members of the Congress and other elected officials about counseling and the great work that you do. There are a lot of issues that will be competing for Congress' attention but Senators and Representatives need to know why your work is important and what they can do to enable Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs).

We also stated recently that this cycle was going to see a "changing of the guard" due to the retirement of certain legislators. Most notably, Senator Harkin's retirement means that we need to find a new champion among Republican Senators that can ensure that the funding for the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program is kept intact. With Senator Wyden (D-OR) moving to the Ranking Member position on the Senate Finance committee, this also gives us the challenge of finding other strong champions on the Senate Finance committee that will support our Medicare bill.

In some cases, our chances of assistance from Congress have probably improved. Take for instance our efforts to place more Licensed Professional Counselors in the Veteran's Healthcare System. This Congress may be more willing to implement lasting real cultural change in the VA so we have a system that is accountable and increases access to healthcare for veterans.

Although we may not know the complete impact of the Republican Congress for some time, one area of public policy that is sure to be impacted is the Affordable Care Act. While many staunch conservatives have continually pushed for a repeal of the entire law, their efforts have been pushed back by the Senate, the President's veto pen and the U.S. Supreme court. However, it remains to be seen if the new majority will attempt a complete repeal again, or if they will work towards amending the law and changing certain provisions that some Democrats may want to revisit as well. Such items include the employer and individual mandates for coverage and the taxes on medical devices. Whether any of these bills and amendments would affect the mental health provisions in the law is not yet known; however be on the look-out.

The question of what the relationship of the Administration with Congress in the next two years will be answered by the types of legislation that the new Congress will put forward. If congressional leaders take the time to devise bills that have bi-partisan support and that have a chance of being signed by the President, then the climate in

Washington could get substantially better. However, if Representatives and Senators focus only on spending the last two year of the Obama Presidency trying to undo the victories of the first six years, then the gridlock will only continue. Republicans face the choice of building a case that they can govern and that their polices work or launching the first salvo of the 2016 election by sending bills that call for the complete repeal of the Affordable Care Act and holding hearings on actions taken by the Administration.

From a local perspective, the results of this year's gubernatorial contests could have far reaching effects on the counseling profession. Some Governors that won re-election last night embraced the Medicare expansion of their states and thus increased access to mental healthcare for millions of people across this country. But in some of those states the implementation of the expansion still leaves counselors out of the loop and thus unable to provide treatment. Other states, whose Governors rejected the expansion of Medicare (such as in Texas and Maine) will be forced to create some sort of solution for the mental healthcare problems that they will face in their communities.

While we will continue to examine the results of the mid-term election, one thing to remember is that now, more than ever, it is important that you must be part of our Government Affairs Network. As these elections show, decisions are made by people who show up to participate in the process. Elections matter; they decide what kind of a country we will live in. But the elections are only one part of our nation's government. Now that they are over, the challenge of governing begins and that is something all of us need to be part of. The candidates that now become public officials need to know what issues are important to you and that you will hold them accountable for their actions or inactions. You must do all you can to let them know that the work that you do is important and that Congress needs to give you the tools to accomplish your work.

You can become involved in ACA's advocacy work by emailing us at [advocacy@counseling.org](mailto:advocacy@counseling.org), calling us at 1-800-347-6647, joining the Public Policy Community on ACA Connect, or visiting our website:

<http://www.counseling.org/government-affairs/public-policy>

Additionally, if you are interested in a particular area of focus, you can contact individual members of the Government Affairs Team. We're providing our contact information so that you can get in touch with us to effect real change. Please know that you can contact our team anytime to talk about advocating for the profession!

**Dillon Harp**

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Dillon can help you get prepared for contacting your elected official and organizing ACA members to become advocates.

**Guila Todd**

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Guila advocates for the profession in all matters dealing with school counseling, workforce initiatives and career readiness.

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Art's responsibilities include advocating for the profession on military and veterans issues as well as advocating for the inclusion of LPCs in Medicare.