

November 23, 2015

Celebrating our History and Honoring Our Gems

As Consumer Voice Celebrates our 40th Anniversary we want to take this opportunity to reflect on our past and recognize the individuals who shaped our organization. In honor of the 40-year ruby anniversary we will highlight Consumer Voice's Gems which include key leaders, organizations, and special moments that have made a significant impact on our organization's development, mission, and advocacy.

For this month's gem, we celebrate policymakers and their staff.

The hard work of policymakers and their staff are one of the most important and effective tools in advocating for long-term care issues and influencing the legislative process.

Without people like Senator George Mitchell and Representatives John Dingell, Pete Stark and Henry Waxman, advocating for legislation to reform the nursing home regulations in the 1980s would have been much more difficult. These policymakers were able to help representatives from the Consumer Voice, the Campaign for Quality Care, and other national organizations by testifying in support of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1987 ([OBRA '87](#)), which established the landmark Nursing Home Reform Law.



Consumer Voice presented the recommendations developed by the Campaign for Quality Care to Congress during a session hosted by Senator David Pryor, who helped craft the landmark nursing home reforms.

In 1995 the Nursing Home Reform Act (NHRA) faced possible repeal or decimation. As part of an effort to overhaul Medicaid, Congress passed a budget bill that would convert Medicaid into a block grant system. Amendments threatened the very essence of the NHRA. In order to save the Act, a campaign was launched and was endorsed by Senators William Cohen and David Pryor and Representatives Pete Stark and Henry Waxman. Their efforts, along with their staff's efforts, are one reason the Nursing Home Reform Act continues to serve as a foundation for quality care.

In addition, policymakers have been instrumental in bringing forth the important issue of nursing home staffing levels in Congress. In 2000, the *Nursing Home Quality Protection Act* was introduced by Representatives Waxman and Jan Schakowsky in the U.S. House of Representatives, which called for publication of staffing levels (ratios of RNs/LPNs/CNAs to residents) data on a HHS website. The same year, Senator Grassley introduced the *Nursing Home Staffing Improvement Act* in the U.S. Senate, legislation that called for all nursing homes collecting Medicare or Medicaid payments to follow minimum registered nurse and nurse's aide staffing levels that the HHS secretary would approve. Even though these bills did not pass in Congress, they played an important role of elevating awareness around nursing home staffing shortages.



Senator Grassley at the Consumer Voice Annual Conference receiving the Public Policy and Leadership Award.

On May 2, 2007 the Special Committee on Aging held the hearing, "The Nursing Home Reform Act Turns Twenty: What Has Been Accomplished, And What Challenges Remain?" and Senator Herb Kohl spoke about improving the quality of care. In the hearing he said, "We need to regularly monitor the nursing home industry and the performance of federal and state regulation, to make sure quality standards are met. As a first step, we will follow this hearing with a written request to CMS to brief us every two months on progress made to implement the recommendations in GAO's testimony that are coming out of this hearing. We will continue to press the Administration to tighten up the enforcement system and make sanctions stick." The voice of Senator Kohl and other policymakers are what put our advocacy efforts into law.



Robyn Grant with Anne Montgomery during the 2013 Consumer Voice Leadership Awards Luncheon. Anne was the recipient of the 2013 Janet Wells Public Policy Leadership Award.

Anne Montgomery, former senior policy advisor for the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging, and her staff have been another great influence and policy team. During her time working in the Senate, Anne was instrumental in ensuring that vital legislation such as the Nursing Home Transparency and Improvement Act and the Elder Justice Act were included in the Affordable Care Act. Anne has also been responsible for several Senate hearings, forums, and Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports that provided oversight of nursing home enforcement and quality.



Representative Jan Schakowsky (IL), leader in improving staffing standards and recipient of the 2009 Consumer Voice Policy Leadership Award.

The work of policymakers to improve the quality of care is ongoing and just this February Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky re-introduced, the [Put a Registered Nurse in the Nursing Home Act](#) - which calls for nursing homes to have a registered nurse (RN) on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



Cathy Hurwit, Chief of Staff, Office of Representative Jan Schakowsky, addresses conference attendees after receiving the 2014 Janet Wells Public Policy Award.

Our policymakers are essential to improving long-term care. Residents of long-term care facilities have the right to participate in the American political process and it is important they support legislators that advocate for their needs. Just because they live in a different place, does not mean they lose their right to vote. Helping residents register and taking them to the polls or bringing the polls to them is essential in making sure their voice is heard. Training materials such as; Tips for Encouraging Residents' Right to Vote for Ombudsman and for Facilities, Common Issues Faced When Residents Vote and Cognitive Impairment and Voting are all available [here](#) and [here](#).

Join us in celebrating 40 years of making quality care matter by signing this [e-card](#), sending a congratulatory message to info@theconsumervoic.org, becoming a [member](#), and/or supporting our current and future work with a [contribution](#).

Like us on [Facebook](#), follow us on [Twitter](#) and visit our [40th Anniversary](#) webpage for additional information and opportunities to celebrate with us.