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The American Academy of Pediatrics 2004 Legislative Affairs Conference was an informative and inspirational introduction to both the art and science of child health advocacy. The conference leadership expertly guided participants through lessons on negotiation, collaboration, media training, and the politics of policy change. The AAP leadership and staff offered diverse backgrounds and interests from which to gain insight into legislative advocacy and perhaps most importantly, brought together a larger group of physicians interested in developing a skill base with whom to network and grow in this experience.

Invited guest speakers and workshop leaders to the conference also added humor, compassion, and depth to the platform: The Honorable Toni Harp offered a vision for a “collective will” or strength through coalition, Dr. Mark McClellan called for focused, practical research to drive policy change, Michael Petit argued for changing politicians’ minds or changing the politicians; The Honorable Jeff Bingaman introduced legislation essential to ensure adequate health insurance to all children, and the Honorable Artur Davis spoke eloquently and compassionately about the disparities and inequalities in health care delivery to the children of this country.

Finally, instruction and guidance on meeting with elected officials provided practical and essential tools for participants to employ in crafting a message, building and joining coalitions, and approaching Congressmen with ideas for change. These lessons were explored through examples of approaches to current public health problems facing children today as well as through role-play and interactive workshops. The final experience of walking through Capitol Hill and presenting ideas to our Congressmen was an exciting and worthwhile opportunity to use our new skills in a creative and productive way.

I am grateful for the scholarship support that allowed me to attend this most important conference. I will continue to act on behalf of children and advocate for their collective welfare, and am now confident I have been well trained and prepared to do so effectively.