

## Using the Big Apple to Sweeten the Message

**B**UILDING ON CURRENT EFFORTS TO DEVELOP and maintain relationships with key congressional offices, the Academy began sponsoring a new activity in 2002—educational trips for congressional staff. The timing was ripe for this type of endeavor since the Academy has already been solidifying ties with key congressional aides through Capitol Hill visits and briefings over the past several years. The Academy has relationships with a substantial base of staffers, and this is one way to take the relationships a step further by giving them a chance to interact individually with Academy leadership and staff.

The Health Practice Council and Life Practice Council jointly sponsored an educational trip to New York City on Dec. 13, 2002. This was the second of two trips that the Academy held last year. The Financial Reporting Council sponsored the inaugural trip to New York on May 3, 2002.

New York City was selected because it is an enticing destination to lure the staffers away from their offices for a day (and escape the daily grind) so they could focus on the meetings we had planned and maybe have a little fun too! Its proximity to Washington, D.C., makes it a very convenient location. (Future trips may be held in other cities, but this has yet to be decided.)

The trip was attended by a bipartisan group of seven congressional aides from the offices of Senators John Edwards (D-NC), Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), and Blanche Lincoln (D-AR), and Representatives Dennis Hastert (R-IL) and Judy Biggert (R-IL).

Academy member Dan McCarthy (immediate past-president) hosted the event in his Manhattan offices. Academy President Bob Anker, Jan Carstens (vice president for health), Geoff Sandler (former vice president for health), and Cori Uccello (senior health fellow) participated in the activities. Several Academy staff also attended, including Rick Lawson (executive director), Todd Tuten (former director of pub-

lic policy), Steve English (senior life policy analyst), Heather Jerbi (pension policy analyst), Joanna Ossinger (state health policy analyst), Denise Winston (meeting planner), and me (senior federal health policy analyst).

The day began at 8:30 a.m. when everyone met at Amtrak's Club Acela in Washington's Union Station. Academy staff

handed out packets that contained information about the Academy and both the health and life practice councils as well as some pertinent public statements including the monograph *Group and Health Coverage in the Wake of September 11*; the white paper *Medicare Prescription Drug Plans: The Devil Is in the Details*; and testimony to the National Conference of Insurance Legislators on the proposed *Genetic Discrimination Model Act*—all of which are available on the Academy's website at [www.actuary.org](http://www.actuary.org).

Attendees had a chance to get acquainted before boarding the train, which departed at 9 a.m. While on the train, people chatted over breakfast, read the newspaper, or rested. The three-hour train ride seemed to pass quickly. We pulled into Penn Station in New York at noon, and we were escorted to Milliman USA for a luncheon and a presentation given by Dan McCarthy.

Dan's presentation piqued the interest of the congressional staffers who were unfamiliar with the basics of the Academy and with actuaries in the United States. Dan talked about who actuaries are, how many there are, where they work, what they do, etc. He provided background on how the actuarial profession got started and the organizations that represent actuaries, including some details about the public policy and professionalism roles of the Academy. Dan emphasized the future role of actuaries as "the architects of financial security."

Dan's presentation sparked a question from a Hill staffer about the difference between actuaries and other profes-

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sions, such as accountants, and why a firm would need an actuary as opposed to another financial expert. Dan and Bob both responded to the question, saying that the actuary is uniquely positioned to take into account past trends and numerous other factors in predicting future trends, determining financial reserves needed for the future, pricing products, etc. They emphasized that actuaries bring together many different areas of expertise, which allow them to have a more comprehensive perspective than other professions. Cori Uccello added that actuaries undergo extensive education and training over a period of many years, which also makes this profession distinct.

At the conclusion of Dan's presentation, everyone boarded a bus for a 2 p.m. meeting with officials at the New York

State Insurance Department. On our way to the bus, I spoke to a few congressional staffers who said they found Dan's presentation quite informative, giving them a new understanding of the actuarial profession.

In addition to the officials in the Manhattan office, the meeting at the insurance department drew numerous officials in the Albany office, including Superintendent Gregory Serio, who participated by videoconference.

The discussion first focused on state programs such as Healthy NY and Family Health Plus, which were created to provide health insurance for New Yorkers who lack health insurance coverage. A congressional staff member had a question regarding the rates for Health NY, which led to a more detailed discussion

about the technical aspects of the program. The discussion then turned to how the department regulates insurance, how state department officials deal with federal regulations, and the department's public-policy role.

The meeting lasted only about an hour, though it would have continued longer had time permitted. But we had to board the bus to return to Milliman USA for presentations by Bob Anker and Jan Carstens starting at 3:45 p.m. During a short break before the presentations began, the congressional staffers said they were enjoying the day and were pleased to have the opportunity to meet with the New York State Insurance Department.

Building on that meeting, Bob Anker's presentation focused on insurance regulation—how consumers, insurers, and

## Visibility on Capitol Hill: The Role of the Senior Health Fellow

One of the hottest topics on Capitol Hill right now is Medicare prescription drugs. And due in large part to the efforts of the Academy's senior health fellow, Cori Uccello, policy-makers are turning increasingly to the Academy for an actuarial perspective on this and many other health care issues.

With experience as both a practicing actuary and a public-policy researcher, Cori is especially qualified to be the spokesperson for the actuarial profession on health care issues. Cori became a member of the American Academy of Actuaries and a fellow of the Society of Actuaries while working as an actuary at John Hancock in Boston. She later earned a master's degree in public policy with a concentration in health policy at Georgetown University, while at the same time interning with the Congressional Budget Office. After receiving her graduate degree, she joined the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C., and served there as a senior research associate prior to becoming the Academy's senior health fellow. While at the Urban Institute, she published numerous papers related to health and retirement policy, including analyses of various options to increase health insurance coverage.

"One area where my background is particularly helpful," says Uccello, "is translating actuarial terms into language that policy-makers can understand."

This is evident in the recent paper, "[Medicare Prescription Drug Plans: The Devil Is in the Details](#)," that Cori drafted with Academy member John Bertko in response to a multitude of requests for information on this topic. The paper, which addresses issues

that should be considered when designing a Medicare prescription drug benefit, was well received on the Hill and has spurred requests for additional actuarial input. Moreover, she has received positive feedback from associations and research organizations that have used the paper.

Other recent activities Cori has undertaken include drafting congressional testimony with Academy member Rod Turner on expanding access to health insurance, meeting with Senate HELP, Senate Finance, and House Ways and Means, as well as other congressional agencies, and speaking at Academy Capitol Hill briefings. Although much of her work focuses on federal health policy issues, Cori has also provided assistance to policy-makers on the state level.

Cori has been instrumental in building new relationships and maintaining existing ties with key congressional staff. Her efforts have increased the visibility of the Academy and the actuarial profession among the policy research community as well. Cori is currently assisting a research organization with a study examining Medicare prescription drugs, and she continues to meet with policy experts to promote the work of the Academy.

"When I started at the Academy," Uccello says, "efforts were already under way to reach out to congressional staffers, but over the past year and a half I've heard from more and more policy-makers who turn to us as a nonpartisan, objective source of information."

—Holly Kwiatkowski

regulators are involved in the regulation of market conduct, prices, products, etc., Bob also touched on some trade-offs of strict regulation versus lenient regulation.

Jan Carstens gave the final presentation of the day. She addressed the impact of terrorism on medical and non-medical coverage, using the Academy's Terrorism/Extreme Events Work Group monograph, *Group and Health Coverage in the Wake of September 11*, as a guideline.

Jan discussed different forms of terrorism and the various entities that would be affected by a catastrophic terrorist event, such as individuals, insurance companies, the government, etc. This led to a discussion of how medical claims and premiums, as well as claims and premiums for non-medical coverage such as disability, long-term care, and group life, would be affected by a terrorist attack. The presentation ended with a discussion of the impact of terrorism on solvency and reinsurance.

Jan's presentation prompted several questions about reinsurance from the congressional staffers. They wanted to know what it was and how it worked. They also asked about premium increases and availability of coverage in certain high-risk locations such as New York or Washington, D.C. Other questions focused on the role of risk-based capital as well as the impact of the recently enacted Terrorism Risk Insurance Act of 2002, which creates a federal backstop to limit the liability of the property/casualty insurance industry in the event of a future terrorist attack. Although it was the end of a long day, it was clear the staffers remained alert and interested in the discussion.

Following Jan's presentation, everyone headed to the hotel for an hour of relaxation before meeting for a 7 p.m. reception and dinner, which provided a relaxing environment to discuss the day's events. The staffers' feedback was very

positive. They all said they learned a lot about the actuarial profession, insurance regulation, and the enormous impact another terrorist attack could have in the health care arena. Several staffers told me this was definitely a worthwhile trip and they were glad they attended. Several have since sent thank-you notes.

Over the past year, the Academy has been receiving an increasing number of inquiries from congressional staffers about various health issues ranging from Medicare and prescription drugs to retiree health insurance, long-term care, and the uninsured. We've provided input through written testimony, conference calls, and meetings. The educational trip to New York was the next step in the evolution of building relationships with congressional staffers so they'll look first to actuaries for non-partisan, objective information about financial services policy.



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