

# How Can I Be Politically Involved in Radiology? A Report of the Florida Radiology Resident's Challenge

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## BACKGROUND

We all know the importance of learning when it comes to our future as radiologists. That is what we do every day in residency, and we are, collectively, very good at it. Although there are well-defined systems for acquiring the knowledge required to be excellent radiologists, little attention is paid to the forces that create the professional environment in which radiologists work and receive financial compensation. With that background, it was our intention both to raise awareness among Florida radiology residents of professional and governmental regulatory forces at work locally and nationally and to propose an efficient, accessible method to have an impact on these forces through the Resident's Challenge.

Where did this desire to effect change begin? In May 2011, a group of residents from across the state of Florida attended the AMCLC in Washington, DC. At the conference, we became aware of the issues facing the practice of radiology, including reimbursement, accountable care organizations, and the potential impact of new and proposed legislation. Moreover, the discussion involving a great number of these issues, which directly affect our ability to work and to receive compensation, does not include radiologists, hospitals, or insurers. Instead, legislators in both Washington, DC and our respective state capitals make many of the decisions. We had the opportunity

to visit with our state legislators and their staff members to voice our concerns directly. During the visit, we were provided with ample evidence that if radiologists do not speak up, others will gladly make the decisions for them, often to their detriment. Thus, we knew that we wanted to become more involved because grassroots efforts from residents are essential to the political success of our organizations and profession [1].

## WHAT CAN I DO?

You might say, "So what?" or "I'm too busy with residency demands to go to Washington, DC or my state capital. Plus, it's expensive, and I don't have enough time off as it is!" We understood this and proposed an alternative that can have an even greater impact than a single visit with the legislature. Radiologists in Florida and across the nation have a voice in the political process through political action committees (PACs). The Radiology Advocacy Alliance Political Action Committee represents both the ACR and radiologists in general at a national level in Washington, DC.

In Florida, our voice in Tallahassee is the Florida Radiological Society Political Action Committee (FRS-PAC). The FRS-PAC represents all of the state's radiologists through donations that support candidates who support the interests of our profession. For Florida, this is particularly important because many decisions about Medi-

care and Medicaid are made at the state level. The problem is that the FRS-PAC is underfunded. Its operational budget is \$30,000 per year. In contrast, the operational budget of the Florida trial lawyers' PAC is approximately \$1.4 million per year, and that of the Florida chiropractors' PAC is \$149,000 [2]. We quickly realized that we need to better represent ourselves.

## THE CHALLENGE

Being from Florida, Disney World is a big deal for us. In 2010, Disney World announced that after many years of reported rumors, it would finally initiate monthly payment plans to defray the cost of admission over the course of the year to increase attendance by residents of the state of Florida [3]. It was after this model that we designed our Resident's Challenge.

Our proposal is to join the Resident's Challenge. We asked every resident in the state of Florida to donate \$5 per month toward the FRS-PAC, drawn automatically from an account. This amount is the cost of lunch (or an expensive beverage) once a month. We then did the math: If every resident across the state of Florida contributed \$5 monthly for 12 months, the FRS-PAC's operational budget would increase by \$10,000 annually, an increase of 33%. We also provided options that included either a monthly credit or debit card withdrawal of \$5 per month or a one-time payment of \$60 for a year.

Approximately 12 months into the challenge, we have raised nearly \$2,500. Although resident donations have been solicited at the yearly meeting of the Florida Radiological Society, the total amount donated by residents in the previous year was a mere \$10.

For those residents who signed up during their first, second, and third years of residency, the monthly withdrawal will continue throughout the course of their residencies. To make this a self-sustaining challenge, we plan on presenting this challenge as a structured part of the orientation for incoming first-year radiology residents. We consider it just as important as the health, dental, and malpractice insurance we sign up for during the first week of orientation; moreover, we plan to present this during orientation as a form of job insurance.

## THE FUTURE AND OUR CULTURE

We have challenged our attending radiologists and the local private radiology community to match or beat our contributions and have received acknowledgment for such. After our Resident Challenge was presented at the AMCLC, several states (such as Virginia, Rhode Island, and Louisiana) have expressed a desire to initiate similar efforts. As more states catch the fire of this challenge, our culture of supporting the political process behind radiology will be dramatically strengthened.

Variations of the documents we have used to initiate our challenge will be available on the ACR's Resident and Fellow Section Web site (<http://rfs.acr.org>) in the "Advocacy" section. These can be downloaded and modified for similar campaigns in every state chapter of the Resident and Fellow Section.

Additionally, you can, as a resident, arrange your own monthly contribution to the Radiology Advocacy Alliance Political Action Committee online at <http://www.radpac.org>. We look forward to seeing our Resident Challenge reshape the culture of radiology and keep our future strong.

## REFERENCES

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