

Capitol News

Latest news from YMCA of the USA's Government Relations and Policy Office

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A note from the national director of government relations

Welcome to *Capitol News*. This is a special edition devoted to YMCA National Advocacy Days. It was another successful year with more than 200 staff, volunteers and youth attending and representing more than 45 states including D.C.!

This year we had some exciting speakers including our keynote speaker, Mark Halperin, Political Director at ABC News. He livened up the event with his political stories and election predictions for 2006 and 2008. We also had great national experts who addressed important issues to the YMCA, which was useful for those with meetings on Capitol Hill.

But I think we were all most energized by Dr. Wayne Giles of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) when he called the YMCA's Activate America initiative one of the most important public health movements in the last century. These inspirational comments motivated us all in spreading our message to lawmakers, whether at the local, state or federal level.

In closing, I would like to extend a special thank you to the 45 volunteers who participated this year. It sends a strong message to Congress having your participation.

Best Regards,
Audrey Tayse Haynes

YMCA leaders meet with members of Congress to discuss importance of YMCA programs

Over 200 YMCA staff, youth and volunteers nationwide were in Washington, D.C. on March 26-28 to attend YMCA National Advocacy Days. This annual legislative conference is sponsored by YMCA of the USA and gives YMCAs an opportunity to hear from national experts and leaders about issues important to the YMCA.

This year participants heard from a range of speakers who focused on YMCA of the USA's five main issue areas: health and wellness; children, youth and families; nonprofit; civic engagement and community development; and international issues. Speakers included keynote speaker Mark Halperin, Political Director at ABC News; Dr. Wayne Giles, Director of Division of Adult and Community Health at the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (CDC); Pat Read, Senior Vice President of Public Policy and Government Affairs for Independent Sector; and Marguerite Sallee, President and CEO of America's Promise.

In addition, YMCA leaders spent one day on Capitol Hill meeting with their member of Congress and asking for support on the following legislative items:

- Increase funding for community based federal health prevention and promotion efforts, including YMCA Pioneering Healthier Communities™ program, Steps to a HealthierUS program and Carol White PEP Grants.
- Ensure final passage of the Federal Youth Coordination Act (H.R. 856/S. 409) and increase federal funding for child care, afterschool and HeadStart.
- Support tax incentives to encourage charitable giving and increase oversight and transparency of nonprofit sector.
- Restore funding to Learn & Serve America and Americorps, as well as gain full support for the Community Development Block Grant.

YMCA Congressional Champions acknowledged

As part of this annual conference, YMCA of the USA awards two members of the U.S. Senate and two members of the U.S. House of Representatives with the YMCA Congressional Champion award for their part in helping their local YMCA to build strong kids, strong families and strong communities. Recipients this year included:

Senator Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.) is a long-time volunteer and fundraising campaigner for the Atlanta YMCA. He led a capital campaign to build, and later expand, the Ed Isakson/Alpharetta Family YMCA – a facility named after his father, a member of the original board of the Alpharetta Y. Ed Isakson envisioned a full-facility YMCA in north Fulton County which he knew would have an immeasurable impact on the entire community. Through a great deal of work, Senator Johnny Isakson realized his father's dream through a facility which now serves more than 20,000 individuals.

Senator John Kerry (D-Mass.) was the original co-author of the YouthBuild legislation, a program run by the Old Colony YMCA in Brockton, Mass. YouthBuild educates and trains at-risk young men and women (ages 17-24) who have not completed high school. In addition, the YouthBuild program has built 15,000 affordable homes for low-income families. YouthBuild has been a tremendous success for the Old Colony YMCA for the five years it has been offered. In fact, in January, the Old Colony YMCA announced it had received a \$700,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to spread the program in the city of Fall River.

Congressman Ralph Regula (R-Ohio) has been involved with the YMCA of Central Stark County in Canton, Ohio. As a result of Representative Regula's efforts, the YMCA has been able to provide an educational afterschool program for teens to teach leadership and career skills – a program which has had a significant impact on the community. In addition, the congressman was able to help secure \$2 million for construction of a new YMCA facility in the Stark County.

Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) Representative Hoyer came to the aid of YMCA's Camp Letts, a branch of the YMCA Metropolitan Washington. When the sewer septic system failed and became a critical issue in the opening of camp for children and youth, Representative Hoyer campaigned for both local and congressional support and created the funding opportunity for a new sewer system at YMCA Camp Letts.

Youth attend YMCA National Advocacy Days

This year, Y-USA took a different approach to involving youth in the YMCA National Advocacy Days conference by offering a youth workshop. Eighteen YMCA youth participants attended the *Working in our Nation's Capitol* workshop where a professional panel of speakers collectively represented every branch of the U.S. government as well as public and private sector.



Katie King from the YMCA of Warren County, Arkansas gives the thought for the day.

Panel speakers offered advice and insight regarding professional development, volunteerism, community involvement, mentorship, finding a personal and work life balance, dealing with transition anxiety, and utilizing a network. Each participant took home a resource booklet which detailed youth advocacy and leadership development. The youth workshop was organized and moderated by Melissa Ranck, Y-USA Public Policy Intern.

Government Relations rounds out staff with Director of Federal Relations

Rich Bland has joined the Y-USA Government Relations and Policy office after serving as a special assistant to Jim Wallis at Sojourners/Call to Renewal, a network of faith-based organizations and denominations dedicated to reducing poverty. Rich helped leverage Jim's success with his best selling book on faith and politics as well as served as coordinator of the government relations strategy for the organization.

Prior to working for Jim Wallis, Rich served as Deputy Chief of Staff to the late Senator Patrick Moynihan where he served as speechwriter and oversaw all office functions. Early in his career, Rich also served as a regional coordinator to former Senator and Majority leader George Mitchell.

Rich brings an unusual background in that he has Master's in Theology from Harvard Divinity School, a law degree from the University of Virginia and a Bachelor of Arts from Bowdoin College.

In his role as Director of Federal Government Relations, Rich will be responsible for helping to craft all public policy and government relations activities on the federal level. Rich will also work closely with the state government relations team in continuing to build a successful grassroots advocacy network. You can reach Rich at rich.bland@ymca.net.

Virginia congressman energized by YMCA Activate America

During YMCA National Advocacy Days, a YMCA volunteer met with Congressman Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.) who was excited to learn about the YMCA Activate America initiative. As a result, the congressman has expressed an interest in helping to support the national initiative as well as be involved at the local level.

As Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Congressman Goodlatte sees a lot of potential for YMCAs to become more involved with many of the nutrition programs available through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This is just one example of many fruitful new relationships that local YMCA representatives cultivated on Capitol Hill and around Washington, D.C. during this year's National Advocacy Days.

Y-USA is also pleased to report that almost every single delegation met with their Member of Congress or their staff.

State public policy issues discussed at YMCA National Advocacy Days

About 50 conference attendees took time out from discussing key federal legislative issues to share advocacy innovations at the state and local levels. In an interactive workshop, participants discussed a wide-range of critical public policy issues.

A special thanks to panelists Barry Martin (Pa.), Ann Rosenthal (Ga.) and Kyle Stewart (N.Y.) for sharing their exciting advocacy campaigns fighting against a sales tax on YMCA memberships, launching statewide health and wellness initiatives, and proposing criminal background check legislation.

Many state delegations also met after the workshop to coordinate key talking points and strategies for their Capitol Hill meetings. For more information, contact Kristin Hurdle at kristin.hurdle@ymca.net.



YMCA participants greet each other at the Congressional breakfast.



The YMCA Georgia delegation presents Senator Johnny Issakson with his Congressional Champion Award.