



Legislator Spotlight

Senator Roger Kahn (R-Saginaw)
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee



Q. You have a long-standing relationship with SBHCs, some would liken you to a guardian of school-based health in the state. How did this relationship begin?

A. As a physician, I had the honor and opportunity to be on the Board of Healthy Delivery, Inc. and was able to really understand the work done by school-based health centers. A good case was made to open a school-based health center at Saginaw High School, which was based on student achievement—the drop out rate decreased, attendance was up—and giving access to health care and support to students. You really got a lot of “bang for the buck.” It was a “win-win.”

Q. You have chaired the DCH budget and have been forced, in the past, to make some very difficult decisions. As the state faces another significant shortfall, and now that you are chair of the Appropriations Committee, how will you ensure the health, education, and well-being of children and adolescents in Michigan?

A. Ultimately it comes down to priority setting and relationships with committee members and other legislators to generate support for issues. You have high priority groups; kids and health care are high priorities. Then, there is a lot of competition with high priority groups and it gets difficult. That’s where generating support to improve health care comes into play.

Q. As a physician, what impact do you hope to have in shaping the health of Michigan? Children and adolescent health?

A. Again, it’s about priority setting, but also understanding the drivers of health care: 1) Cost, 2) Access, and 3) Quality. It is really tough to get all three.

If I were to redesign health care, I would really work on changing the paradigm. We need to improve home care needs, increase the number of health centers, which are very cost-effective, promote wellness, and keep people out of hospitals. We really need to focus on community-based solutions.

Q. At the end of this legislative session, what would you have hoped to accomplish? What would you like your legacy to reflect?

A. Overall, I would like to get our state back on a structurally sound footing—we need jobs to empower people to be less dependent on the government and to use our tax dollars to get the best bang for our buck.

Regarding health care and youth, I want us to address issues on the front end and help kids get through school. If we don't, statistics show us that there will be more issues to confront in adulthood.

Q. Tonight is the State of the State, what are you expecting to hear and what do you want to hear most?

A. I believe the Governor will talk about focusing on getting Michigan back on track. We've seen some improvements in unemployment and state revenue. I am hoping to hear how things will be enhanced for all of us, like he has said repeatedly, we are not going to leave anyone behind, and I would like to hear more about that.

Q. What is one piece of advice you would like to offer to the young people reading this?

A. Stay in school and get an education. It is the biggest gift you can get in life. It is empowering.

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