

Capitol Hill Dentist Goes to

An interview with Congressman and dentist Paul Gosar



U.S. Rep. Paul Gosar is one of two dentists currently serving in Congress. Needless to say, his experience as a dentist has made him well equipped to deal with the daily challenges of life in the federal government. I recently interviewed the freshman representative who hails from my home state, Arizona. You will enjoy learning about his path to D.C., opinions on health-care reform and the challenges of living in two places. *continued on page 88*

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“You can convey a message and share a message with your patients. For every dollar in dentistry, 50 cents comes from the patient. Patients find value in what we do.”

– Congressman Paul Gosar

You have a legacy of public service on the local level in Arizona, including serving the Arizona Dental Association as president. At what point did you decide you wanted to make a run for Congress?

Gosar: I think it was a buildup. I served the council and government affairs for the American Dental Association 14th district, representing seven states. I saw inconsistencies at the federal level in regard to work force jurisdictions and agencies’ regulations. Things were happening without the consent of the American people; a dictation to them instead of allowing them to be part of the solution. I said “Enough,” and was asked if I’d consider becoming a representative... and so here we are.

Many politicians are so politicized by the time they get to D.C., they lose their eagerness to affect change. You are not a career politician. Have you come across other freshmen Congressmen who are similar to you in their path to Congress?

Gosar: Yes. I think there is about 30 percent who have not held elective positions in our class. I might be a little off, but the number is pretty close to that. What’s interesting – there are car dealers who had no political experience. They had some interaction with their local Chamber of Commerce but had never done it in elective capacity. We are seeing a whole new batch of politicians who are not career politicians and I think it is what America wanted. I think what people wanted was a fresh set of eyes and a fresh set of principles.

Have you come across any other physicians or dentists in the group?

Gosar: There are no other dentists. I am the only dentist in this class. I joined Mike Simpson who is a dentist out of Idaho. There are six physicians who were elected. I think this is a perfect time to have doctors in Congress. The first thing we have to do when we see a patient is listen. Second is gather the facts to make a diagnosis and then provide treatment plans and share with the patients. We have to practice these same three steps as Congressmen.

The health-care legislation bill has been repealed by Congress, but we know the president will not sign off on it. What is the effect of the repeal going to be?

Gosar: I can’t speak for the Senate side and I can’t speak for the president, but what I can do is do *my* job. When you see the polls, this is a very inappropriate bill and not looked well upon by the public – and who can blame them? It brings a bureaucrat between you and your doctor in making those decisions.

The president will need to look at it with his veto pen and take the challenges that come with that. From our side, we are mandated by Congress to have the oversight to ask questions. Questions are asked not only by the Committee of Oversight but in each of the committees that have relevance. Eventually we will need to isolate areas that are most onerous and correct those.

Dentists around the U.S. wonder if health-care reform will affect their practices. How will the reform bill affect the practice of dentistry?

Gosar: Unfortunately, there is still a lot of gray area. What is so onerous about this bill is that numerous times throughout the bill it gives the authority to the Secretary of Health and Human Services – allowing one person to interpret the bill for millions of people. This gives one individual the choice to make or break us.

What would you recommend to dentists who want to be more politically active?

Gosar: Get involved. You don’t have to run for Congress. You don’t have to run for the state Senate or legislature or even city council. You can convey a message and share a message with your patients. For every dollar in dentistry, 50 cents comes from the patient. Patients find value in what we do.

How do you expect to have an impact on the dental profession as a member of Congress?

Gosar: First of all, I want to make sure we are providing for a free market and business orientation. The playing field must be level – offering individuals success and failure equally, and allowing the prospect for people to pick themselves up by their bootstraps to succeed again. I want that playing field of choice, the free marketplace at its finest. I think this is what dentistry emulates. We have a business model that works, but we have to be able to tell our story and show how things will change over time.

I presume at some point in this process you had to sell or close your practice, or just had someone take it over.

Gosar: I sold my practice last May. I am happy that a young man from Flagstaff bought my practice.

How will you divide your time between Washington D.C. and Arizona?

Gosar: When I am in D.C., I live in my office. I actually sleep in my office. I am only in D.C. to do a job. My home is in the West, in Arizona.

How often do you stay in D.C.?

Gosar: We have four-day work weeks. Since they just changed from a three-day work week, we now have consolidating days off – a week off for every three weeks on. This way, I can go into my district and spend time. I want to stay in each area for two or three days and then go to the next one and be taught. I sat chairside for 25 years and heard the stories and experiences, but this is an opportunity for me to live those experiences and understand how people work and interact and how different cultures and industries actually work.

How big is the staff you manage?

Gosar: The maximum staff we can have is 22. We have our full complement here. We have some very gifted people.

Do you have separate staff in D.C. and Arizona, or do they travel when you travel?

Gosar: They are separate. However, I brought my Washington staff to Arizona in February for a seminar on customer service, communications and empowerment. We went through the district with the team, to put names with faces. It's about teamwork and about understanding.

Aside from health care, what other issues have your attention?

Gosar: My background is laden with natural resources and forestry. I am originally from western Wyoming and I have lived in the forest. My dad is a geologist. Natural resources and how we interact with, utilize and benefit from them is going to be a big issue for me.

When you are in D.C., I am sure you are pulled in a million different directions. In terms of managing your schedule – what is a typical day like?

Gosar: The first two weeks have been atypical, but I do have many appointments throughout the day. There are specific times where we need to be on the floor voting. There are times that we meet with the committees on which we serve. I have three subcommittees on oversight and two or three subcommittees on natural resources. Plus, I have my doctor's caucus. I am with the freshmen. Luckily, just like in my practice, I have great staff who I trustingly turn to for scheduling.

Paul, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with *Dentaltown Magazine*. The ideals which you stand on strike a chord with many of our readers. ■