

## JSAC: No Excuses, Just a Great Meeting

*Susan R. Cordes, MD  
Board of Governors Member-at-Large*

With spring just around the corner, thoughts go to longer days, warmer weather, and the Joint Surgical Advocacy Conference (JSAC), which takes place March 27-29, 2011, immediately following the BOG Spring Meeting. I still remember the first time I attended the meeting and how surprised I was that I enjoyed it so much.

Before attending my first JSAC, I thought it was a meeting for people “into” politics or “political junkies.” I quickly discovered that this is false; it is truly a political meeting for surgeons. The meeting begins with a review of the political issues facing otolaryngologists, after which even the most politically naïve feel comfortable discussing the issues. Subsequent talks cover the basics of advocacy (or advanced advocacy for JSAC veterans). Additional topics ensure that attendees are completely ready to storm Capitol Hill and be heard.

Prior to that first JSAC, I was intimidated by the prospect of meeting with legislators or their staffs. It was a huge relief that we visited their offices in groups. Being in a group allows each person to talk as much or as little as he or she is comfortable. Between appointments, it’s just fun to go trooping around Capitol Hill with your surgical colleagues. And I recall thinking how fortunate I am to live in a country where I can go to the nation’s capital and meet with our leaders to discuss issues and express concerns.

With a couple hundred surgeons attending the meeting, I believed there were plenty of others to get the word to Congress and that I didn’t really need to go. But it only takes a day on Capitol Hill to see that numbers matter. Various groups swarm the Hill to voice their concerns, and the larger the group, the better the chance of getting noticed.

Leaders in our specialty have challenged us to show we care by meeting with legislators, and JSAC is a chance to do just that. Times are tough and everyone is really busy, but JSAC is time well-spent. It takes just

two weekdays away from work to have the opportunity to impact the future of healthcare. Decisions made by Congress now will not only affect the way we practice medicine, but will influence the healthcare that is available to us and our families when we get sick. That is certainly worth two days.

JSAC is a much smaller meeting than many others. This is beneficial in that it is just “us surgeons,” and it’s a great opportunity to connect with colleagues, to network, and even get to know the other surgeons in your community and state. After meeting at JSAC, surgeons in my state have kept in touch regarding political issues and have collaborated on local activities and meetings.

JSAC is attended by Academy leaders, including BOG leaders and current and past Academy presidents; it is a great opportunity to get to know them as well.

I was hesitant to attend my first JSAC meeting. I was worried that I wouldn’t know what to say or that I couldn’t answer a question, but I was surprised to find what a well-planned and enjoyable meeting it is. I came home well-informed and energized to stay on top of the issues.

And at the risk of sounding like a cliché, I was proud to be an American. It is a privilege that we live in a country where we can visit our leaders, and it is exciting to take advantage of that privilege. I have been to every JSAC since my first one, and I am looking forward to this year’s meeting just as eagerly. I hope to see you there! 

