



**American Orthotic &
Prosthetic Association**

November 5, 2014

Dear AOPA Member:

I've been asked to provide an assessment as to what the November 4 mid-term election, and the Republican rout that impressively 'flipped' the U.S. Senate from 55 to 45 (Democrat majority in 113th Congress), to what looks most likely as 54 to 46 (Republican majority in 114th Congress) means to O&P. Let me preface this by saying that I think everyone is thankful the election is over so none of us has to watch another attack ad, or receive still another fundraising email. Very knowledgeable pundits have repeated many obvious things ad nauseam, so I promise to make this concise.

If we measure the impact of the election on O&P in terms of how our O&P PAC contributions were deployed, then the news is very good. Your PAC supported 28 candidates—19 Republicans, and 9 Democrats, and if projections are right, we were right on 25 of those "bets," or 90%! We made a strong commitment to new Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), and we are hopeful his election will be a big plus for O&P. And we also provided strong support to two prospective new members of the U.S. Senate: (a) Bill Cassidy (R-LA), a physician, a member of the House, a former Policy Forum Speaker and very likely to emerge from next month's run-off as the new Senator from Louisiana; and Senator-Elect James Lankford (R-OK) who, in his former capacity as Chair of the House Oversight & Government Reform Health Subcommittee earlier this year was very helpful in focusing attention on the perils of RAC audits and ALJ delays impacting O&P professionals.

Probably the biggest loss for O&P resulting from this election relates to diminished presence for two Senators, both Democrats, whom we have counted as friends. Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), long a leading voice for the disability community and co-signer on a recent important letter to Administrator Tavenner on OTS orthotics, has retired, which also means we lost the lead sponsor of the Insurance Fairness to Amputees bill. Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) is no longer the Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, so we lost a committed O&P advocate in a high place. His very likely successor, Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) has been sensitive to O&P issues, and his staff is both knowledgeable and responsive. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), who championed our DoD outcomes research funding, won re-election and will be back, and we hope to continue to work with him, albeit in his likely new role in the Minority Leadership.

Our House champion, Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) won re-election, had our solid PAC support, and we are confident she will continue to draw focus on O&P issues. Both of the co-sponsors of our Medicare bill—Glenn Thompson (R-PA) and Mike Thompson (D-CA) won re-election, so we will continue to rely on their support as well as the 17 other House members supported by our PAC who will be returning for the new 114th Congress in January.

Let me close with prognostication on two frequent questions. *First, will the results of the election break the current Washington gridlock?* Both parties always promise to work together, but now we have the legislative branch concentrated in the Republican party and the executive branch still in the Democratic party. They may work together in essential areas, but since gridlock reflects an ideological divide within the country itself, I think odds are that President Obama will veto a substantial number of bills passed by both Houses, and that Senate Democrats will be a barrier to overriding most of those vetoes—so much gridlock is likely to continue. *Will Obamacare be repealed?* Depending on the precise Senate rules, Democrats may be able to block by filibuster, votes on any bills to repeal Obamacare, and of course the President would veto any bill which was enacted by both Houses, and Senate Democrats can unite to sustain such vetoes. So repeal seems pretty unlikely, however, there could be efforts to amend the ACA, and prospects for such bipartisan efforts succeeding are probably greater.

So, the 114th Congress will convene in January. Once Congress sets its calendar, AOPA will be able to set dates for the 2015 AOPA Policy Forum—watch for it, and come and meet your new representatives.

Sincerely,

Thomas F. Fise
Executive Director