

2010 UPHA Day at the Legislature

Per our membership's request to have a greater law-making presence, UPHA sponsored its first ever "legislative break" on February 23. Our organization provided a menu of fresh fruit, bagels and a variety of fruit juices to hungry law-makers. As the Senators and Representatives entered their respective kitchen areas to pick up these healthy treats, UPHA leaders were able to discuss the ways our organization could assist them in advancing sound public health policy. We also lobbied for our three legislative priorities by soliciting support for *HB196 Tobacco Tax Revisions* and *HB153 Recycling of Electronic Items* and by thanking legislators for voting down safety-weakening amendments to *HB113 Child Restraints*.

The action was fast and furious and the two-hour time slot seemed more like a mere 20 minutes. UPHA President Brian Bennion and Legislative Chair Myron Bateman met with all but two Senators while Executive Director Paul Wightman, Vice President Eric Edwards, and Board Member Darrin Sluga had discussions with the majority of our State Representatives. Despite the high volume of contacts, many productive conversations took place and even though not *all* legislators agreed with our positions, most were supportive of our priority bills. The lawmakers with whom we interacted treated us kindly and with respect although one member did not care for our healthy food selection (he viewed the food, groaned loudly, promptly stabbed a single piece of pineapple with a toothpick and headed directly to the soft drink fountain where he poured himself a Coke, took a deep chug, and appeared much happier). Hey, you can't win 'em all.

Participants felt the pre-event goal that "*All Capitol Hill staff will have a positive impression of UPHA and better understand how our organization can be of service to the residents of Utah*" was surpassed. We even achieved one of our longer-term goals where decision-makers call on UPHA members as public health experts: Rep. Becky Edwards requested that someone from UPHA testify in support of *HB 456 Amendments to Department of Environmental Quality* at a committee hearing.

This event was an excellent step in UPHA becoming more relevant in public health policy discussions; however, this was just one step. It will be critical to follow up with those legislators with whom we have made initial contact. Ideally, both the UPHA representatives who took part in the event and our association's members who are constituents of each respective legislator will contact these lawmakers and remind them that the Utah Public Health Association is ready and willing to serve.