BY MICHAEL C. DALSING, MD

While I may be the Society for Vascular Surgery (SVS) Political Action Committee (PAC) chair, I find I still need a refresher from time to time regarding the members of Congress serving on committees that deal with healthcare issues where the SVS PAC needs to dedicate the most time and resources. So, as the second session of the 116th Congress is now getting into full swing, I wanted to share information on the three major committees that deal with healthcare policies influenced by the legislative process.

The House Committee on Energy and Commerce has the broadest jurisdiction of any authorizing committee in Congress. It deals with issues including healthcare, substance abuse and health insurance. It has oversight of biomedical research and development, device and drug safety and consumer protection/product safety. It deals with electronic communications and the internet as well as privacy, cybersecurity and data security. The House Ways and Means Committee exercises jurisdiction over revenue and related issues, including Medicare and Social Security. On the Senate side, the Committee on Finance is concerned with taxation and other revenue matters, including the health programs under the Social Security Act.

Many of the topics of concern and need for patient advocacy reside in these committees, so one can well imagine that legislation must be monitored, and advocacy efforts, feedback and direct contacts considered. This basic knowledge helps to explain where our donations are most used and how it affects our scorecard (visit vsweb.org/PACscorecard). The “Doctors Caucus,” meanwhile, is composed of medical providers in Congress who utilize their medical expertise to develop patient-centered healthcare policy and often support SVS goals.

There are many voices in the ears of our legislators. They want to do the right thing for their constituents, but most are not healthcare experts. Certainly, the hospitals, the insurers, the lawyers and industry have an opinion, and are actively seeking to gain lawmakers’ attention. Here are some of the top PACs and their contributions to candidates in 2019: American Bankers Association, $1,402,700; Blue Cross Blue Shield, $1,115,500; and American Hospital Association, $662,945.

These groups are willing to support that quest for a place at the table. Are we? We must be present as the voice of reason and a trusted ally in the effort to provide the best vascular care. That is the mission of all of us and that of our larger group, the SVS. The SVS PAC needs your support to protect our patients. Donate today at vsweb.org/PAC.

Michael C. Dalsing is the chair of the SVS PAC.