

Government Relations

ProHealth Care, Inc.

Challenge: To prevent the largest health care competitor in the state from obtaining local zoning approval required to build a new \$85 million hospital three miles away from an existing, community-based hospital.

Target: Local government officials in the Town of Summit and Waukesha County, Wis., citizens of the surrounding communities, local businesses, civic leaders, news media and ProHealth board members, physicians, medical staff and employees.

Solution: Bottom Line developed an integrated grassroots marketing campaign to raise awareness of and generate opposition to the new hospital among the target audiences. Our team organized a coalition of volunteers and citizens, known as "Not Another Hospital." The group lobbied local government and county board members, and held rallies with ProHealth employees to voice their opinion about the new hospital. Our team created a Web site to update the public about the hospital zoning bid and to maintain a dialogue between the community and leaders at ProHealth. Based on initial polling information about community opinion, our team developed a series of advertisements for print, radio, billboards and the Internet.

Fed up with several years of double digit price increases in health care coverage for their 50,000 employees, more than 100 Waukesha County businesses also joined the fight by forming the "Concerned Businesses for Responsible Health Care" group. Our team also worked with business leaders from the Independent Business Association of Wisconsin and the Business Health Care Group of Southeast Wisconsin to generate letters and phone calls to county board members, as well as editorial letters and fact sheets. The only legal basis for denying the zoning permission for the new hospital was that it would be a bad land use decision for the county. Located off the interstate at a major intersection, the proposed site was one of the most valuable pieces of property available in the county. Business leaders argued that it was a bad land use to turn the property over for tax-exempt development. Leaders also argued that building a redundant hospital would increase health care costs, making the county less attractive to both existing and new employers.

Outcome: With a promise from the developers of \$250,000 in annual payments in lieu of property over 25 years, the local government easily approved the needed zoning changes. However, the active engagement of local employers and business groups convinced 21 of 36 county board members to vote “no” on the zoning changes. It was the second time in four years that our team prevented local government approvals needed to build the new hospital in the western part of this rapidly growing county. Follow-up research also showed that the competitor’s reputation had been tarnished by the debate, but that ProHealth’s image remained very positive as the leading local provider of high-quality health care at a rational price.