

they will not pay their water bills any longer, or because of me they are going to have to buy a water filter—all in all, the response has been pretty positive.

With the governor's signature on the fluoridation bill, I am optimistic that we can finally put the fluoridation issue to rest. When the measure became law, a *Los Angeles Times* editorial stated that "the governor's signature hopefully marks the end of a long and loony debate" and the *Sacramento Bee* echoed those sentiments and stated that the new law "closes one of the silliest chapters in California's history."

I'd like to add that one of the most important lessons I learned from spon-

soring the fluoridation measure was that many of my colleagues in the legislature never considered the problem of oral health a significant one and that, in fact, tooth decay is often overlooked in many public health dialogues. The reason for oral health being separated from the total public health picture is not clear. Perhaps it is because most people have separate dental and general health insurance, so they consider them as two different needs. They often think of dental care as secondary, because in many instances, they consider dental problems non-life threatening.

All of you here today know that good oral health is an important message we need to reiterate to lawmakers

and policymakers. Tooth decay is a major economic health problem in California and it affects 90 percent of our population. Two-thirds of the \$650 million dollar Denti-Cal program is spent on restorative dentistry that can be largely avoided through water fluoridation.

We hope, now that the state of California has approved fluoridation of its drinking water, that we will have a renewed spotlight on oral health in our state, and more leverage in promoting oral health programs through future budget and legislative policy negotiations.

Thank you for this important award.

1996 Special Merit Award: Hermine McLeran, BS, MPH

Presented by Rhys Jones, DDS, MS, Immediate Past-president

The Special Merit Award is given to an individual for special meritorious service to dental public health. Our 1996 award is presented to Hermine McLeran, associate professor, Department of Preventive and Community Dentistry, and director of the Aging Studies Program, University of Iowa. A qualifier for this award is that it helps to have put in hours and hours and days and days of work as a representative of AAPHD toward improving the oral health of the public. Hermine is well qualified for the Special Merit Award.

I was finally able to get her to sit down in the lobby yesterday and recall her history of service to AAPHD. She began attending AAPHD meetings prior to 1976. She could not recall her first meeting. Her original introduction to AAPHD came through dental hygienist consulting for Indian Health Service Head Start. As a consultant, she happened to meet a guy by the name of Bob Mecklenburg and he suggested she attend an AAPHD national meeting. Hermine was one of the so called "charter" dental hygienist members who was given full membership and voting privileges to AAPHD in 1976, the year Bob Mecklenburg was president. In 1985, she was elected

to the Executive Council. She has chaired the legislative and oral health committees, served as secretary/treasurer beginning in 1988, was elected vice-president in 1992, then served as president-elect, and president in 1994. She continues to serve as chair of the Continuing Education Committee.

The real work by Hermine, however, has been done for the oral health of the nation. In response to the "Future of Dental Public Health Report," Hermine organized and initiated the process for the Strategic Plan for Dental Public Health and helped to form the Coalition for Oral Health, a coalition of 26 national organizations that rallied around health care reform efforts. She is AAPHD representative on the coalition and was elected vice-president of the group. During the health care reform movement, no one made more effective visits to Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, than Hermine and Marty Liggett of the American Association of Dental Schools.

These two individuals almost single-handedly organized and coordinated dental public health's fight for oral health in health care reform, pushing for a solution to the problem of untreated dental disease and lack of access for vulnerable populations. The

coalition's solution to the problem is that it is essential that oral health care be considered no differently than any other form of health care. A basic package of preventive and primary care benefits, including oral health benefits, should be required to be provided to all Americans as a part of a public or private insurance program and delivered in both community and individual settings. If health care reform would have happened, oral health would have made it—thanks in large measure to Hermine's efforts.

Hermine received her dental hygiene and MPH degrees from the University of Michigan. She has had a varied career: as a consultant with the Michigan Department of Health; as a dental health educator in Alameda County, California; as a dental hygiene instructor in California and the University of Iowa; and for the past 16 years as coordinator of the Aging Studies Program at the University of Iowa. She has a number of publications and grant activities and has received numerous awards, the latest being the University of Michigan Outstanding Dental Hygiene Alumni Award.

Congratulations, Hermine, on receiving the AAPHD Special Merit Award.