

## Battling the pandemic from Washington state to Washington, D.C.

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**Editor's note:** *Pediatricians around the country have risen to the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic. Some are on the front lines battling the virus; others are connecting with patients while hunkered down at home. They are relying on creativity, ingenuity and tenacity to keep their patients healthy and their practices afloat. Here is one pediatrician's story.*

When COVID-19 hit, U.S. Rep. Kim Schrier, M.D., FAAP (D-Wash.), found herself straddling both sides of the country.

All eyes were on her home state of Washington, which faced one of the first outbreaks, as well as Washington, D.C., where she was among lawmakers who were hammering out legislation to address the virus.

As the first pediatrician elected to Congress and the only female physician in Congress, Dr. Schrier served as a trusted source of health information not only for her constituents, but also her colleagues in the U.S. Capitol.

For her, the threat of the pandemic was very real and urgent given what was happening in Washington state.

Early on, this personal obligation hit a crescendo during a caucus breakfast meeting while she watched her colleagues eat from a buffet and cough into their hands. Dr. Schrier stood up among about 200 of her fellow legislators and voiced her concerns.

"You may think this is not coming to your state, but it's probably already there and you need to take this very seriously," she said she told the group. At the time, a nursing home in Washington state was making news as it experienced one of the first outbreaks in the country.

She reminded lawmakers that even mundane tasks needed to be taken with great care, like sneezing or coughing into an elbow, avoiding elevator buttons and washing hands

constantly.

Dr. Schrier admitted it was out of character for her to give an impassioned speech during a caucus meeting, but many of her colleagues were grateful for her advice.

“(It was) really kind of a wake up,” she said.

She also recalled how her friends reached out to set up playdates for their children after the schools were shut down, and similarly, she had to explain why that was not a good idea.

Over several weeks, Congress passed three bills to combat the coronavirus. Dr. Schrier was in Washington, D.C., for the first two, and back in Washington state for passage of the third, which came together with many emails and phone calls, she said.

“It did happen with remarkable speed and with cooperation between both parties,” Dr. Schrier said.

Two of Dr. Schrier's priorities were access to COVID-19 testing and policies to support children's well-being, like the expansion of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits and ensuring children would not go hungry if schools closed.

“Our health care system is going to need a lot more,” she said. Among her concerns are financial support for clinics and equal pay for telehealth.

When *AAP News* spoke with Dr. Schrier, she was back home working in her district. Her days were packed with calls, as she and her staff listened to constituents and focused on policies to address the virus.

“Everybody has their own circumstance, and so we're really just trying to be a resource for people,” she said.

When asked whether she misses being a practicing pediatrician as she serves in Congress, Dr. Schrier said she always has both ideas in her mind, but she feels she is “doing a greater good on the national scale right now.” Instead of giving advice patient-by-patient, she has a platform to reach her entire state and the country.

*To read other pediatricians' stories,*

visit <https://www.aapublications.org/news/2020/04/21/covidvignettes042120>.

## **Resource**

- [The AAP is collecting stories of member pediatricians during the COVID-19 pandemic, so that we can lift up and thank the heroes among us, advocate for the needs of on-the-ground physicians and share the experiences of other pediatricians with our community of members. The AAP will share select stories in blogs, social media and other communications, with permission. To share your story, visit \[www.aap.org/COVIDstory\]\(http://www.aap.org/COVIDstory\).](#)

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